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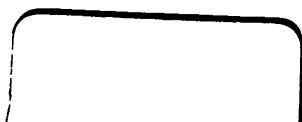


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NOT WITHOUT THORNS.

NOT WITHOUT THORNS.

A Story.

BY

ENNIS GRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "SHE WAS YOUNG AND HE WAS OLD," ETC.

"D'ailleurs qui est-ce qui atteint son idéal?"—V. HUGO.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.
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NOT WITHOUT THORNS.

CHAPTER I.

EAVESDROPPING.

Rom. The hurt cannot be much.

Mer. No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough.



IT was the day of the Winsley Hunt Ball. The Halswood Chancellors' stay had already considerably exceeded the week originally proposed as its extent; but Gertrude had persuaded them "not to talk of going away" till after the twenty-fifth, the date of this important local event. So they had stayed on, and with them the Exytons and the Gourlays, and ever so many other people, till the Grange was filled to overflowing with fine ladies and

gentlemen, and still finer ladies' maids and gentlemen's gentlemen.

Gertrude was in her element, so in his own way was Beauchamp ; he had felt much more comfortable since there had been a little more going on, and he had had less time for solitary meditation ; and Roma, though he had not seen her for several days except in general society, was so agreeably gentle and subdued, that he began to think his new way of behaving to her was really going to prove a success. At any rate he would try it a little longer, it would do her no harm ; and so long as the house was as lively as it had been lately, time did not hang heavy on his hands. There were two or three young ladies among the visitors in whom Adelaide Chancellor had discovered kindred spirits, so Roma was freed from the burden of entertaining the girl, and not sorry to be so ; for the first few days during which they had been more thrown together had been quite enough for Miss Eyrecourt. Yet she felt very lonely sometimes ; Gertrude seemed to be always surrounded by her guests, and

to make her plans and arrangements without consulting Roma in the old way at all, and the understanding between her and Mrs. Chancellor was evidently closer and more confidential than ever.

It was a mild spring-like morning : the meet, one of the last of the season, was at some distance from the Grange, and most of the guests had set off early, riding and driving, to be in time for it. Beauchamp—who did not hunt, not being rich enough to do so in what he considered proper style, but who nevertheless rode well enough, and managed to be always sufficiently well mounted to look as if his forswearing the field was to be solely attributed to eccentricity or indolence—had preferred this morning to drive Lady Exyton's ponies, their pretty owner at his side. Addie had borrowed the horse Roma usually rode, and under her father's wing intended to do great things ; every one had arranged to go somehow or with somebody except Roma herself, who, fancying that nobody wanted her, and that her sister-in-law would prefer her remaining in the back-

ground, had kept out of the way till it was too late for her to be included in any of the arrangements.

It was rather a relief to be alone for a little while. She was, in a general way, fond of amusement and society, accustomed and not indifferent to a fair share of admiration. But lately she had not had heart or spirit to enter into things as usual; Gertrude's coldness had already, it seemed to her, affected the tone of others; she said to herself she was getting old, "nearly five and twenty," and "passée," and ill-tempered, and it would not be long before Beauchamp would congratulate himself heartily on not having been taken at his word by her.

"I almost wish sometimes I could have cared for him as he cares or thinks he cares for me. But it would have been dreadful to have so vexed Gertrude after all her kindness to me. It is bad enough to feel that she distrusts me without my deserving it, but that would have been worse. No; I should not like to care for him; but it is very lonely sometimes."

She was pacing slowly up and down a sheltered terrace walk that ran along one side of the house. On to this walk opened by glass doors several of the rooms most used by the family, the library, the morning-room, Mrs. Eyrecourt's little boudoir, and between these glass doors were placed here and there garden seats against the wall. Roma got tired of walking up and down ; though still only February it was temptingly mild, so she sat down on one of the seats without observing that the glass door nearest it was slightly ajar. Voices from within reached her, she heard the sound of her own name ; then before she had time to realize what she was doing, two or three sentences fell with cruel distinctness upon her ears.

"It is very difficult for me to think it is Roma's fault. She has assured me so earnestly that there was nothing of the kind on her part, I cannot bear to think how she must have deceived me."

The voice was Gertrude's ; the tone anxious and irresolute. Then came the answer ; it was Mrs. Chancellor who was speaking now.

“Ah, yes ; that is the worst part of it. I can feel for you, my dear Gertrude ; I can indeed. As to the affair itself, had she only been frank about it, one could hardly have blamed her. A man of dear Beauchamp’s attractions, thrown so much in her society—and she, of course she is handsome in a certain style, and her singing is really good, though not *quite* refined enough to suit my taste ; but—what was I saying ? Oh yes, of course, she, you know, is no longer very young, and has nothing, literally nothing you say, to look forward to ? It is only too natural. It is most distressing altogether, and how perplexing for Beauchamp, dear fellow. A moment’s folly or weakness and a young man may be ruined, ruined in a sense of course, for life ! Ah yes, I see it all, far more clearly than can be possible for one so young and unsuspecting as you, dearest Gertrude. But I do think Beauchamp has behaved beautifully, from what you tell me, *beautifully*. And——”

But just then there came a knock at the door of the boudoir in which the two ladies

were sitting, and Mrs. Chancellor's maid appeared, or rather, that is to say, the sound of her voice penetrated to Roma still motionless on the garden seat outside, and it became evident to the involuntary eavesdropper that the confidential tête-à-tête was at an end. She had not meant to listen ; just when the interruption came she had been on the point of marching into the room and stating what she had heard. Now of course before the servant it was out of the question. She rose from her seat, ran along the terrace and entered the house at the other side ; then hastening upstairs she waited at the door of her own room till, as she expected, in a few minutes she saw Mrs. Chancellor coming along the passage, followed by the maid, who wished to consult her about some important question of millinery for the evening's adornment.

Then Roma walked deliberately downstairs again, across the hall, down the passage to the door of Gertrude's boudoir, at which she knocked, and in obedience to her sister-in-law's unsuspecting "come in," entered Mrs.

Eyrecourt's presence with no sign of agitation or uneasiness on her countenance.

"Gertrude," she said, quietly. Gertrude started a little; she had not expected to see Roma, and glancing up at her now she felt instinctively that something must be the matter. Roma's face was so grave, and she looked so dreadfully tall. What could it be? Gertrude laid down her pen—she was in the middle of a letter—and waited in some alarm for what was to follow, feeling perhaps the least little bit in the world guilty, when she remembered what her thoughts had lately been of her sister-in-law. "Gertrude," said Roma again, "I have come to tell you that I heard what you said of me just now; what you said and what you allowed Mrs. Chancellor to say of me in this very room not ten minutes ago."

Mrs. Eyrecourt grew crimson. There was no evading the charge; it was far too direct and circumstantial. She tried getting angry.

"I needn't remind you of the old proverb about listeners, Roma," she said, with an

attempt at haughty indignation. "There was a time when I could hardly have believed you capable of such a thing, even though confessed by yourself; but I must have been mistaken in you in more ways than this. I cannot help your having heard what was said. I am not bound never to say anything about you that you would not like to hear—and to a near relation of my own too! You cannot expect to dictate to me what I am to talk about to my cousin."

"That is nonsense, Gertrude," answered Roma, so gently that the words did not sound disrespectful. "I have no intention of dictating to you. I have not even hinted at finding fault with what you said and allowed Mrs. Chancellor to say, though I might perhaps be excused if I thought it hard that I should be so discussed by you with a person whom you have not known a fortnight; and it is nonsense for you to pretend that you think me capable of low eavesdropping. You *know* you don't think so, Gertrude. Of course you know that my overhearing anything was purely accidental,

and in your heart, Gertrude, you are bitterly sorry, not only that I overheard what I did, but that there was anything of the kind for me to hear."

Gertrude was silent. "I don't know if I am or not," she said, half petulantly. "I don't want to distrust you, Roma. If you heard all, you must have heard me say I could not bear to think you had deceived me."

"And why should you think so?" exclaimed Roma, more vehemently. "I have *never* deceived you, dear Gertrude. You have been very good to me all these years since my mother died and I was left alone; there has never been any cloud between us, except about this unfortunate infatuation of your brother's. I am not, in a sense, surprised at a woman like Mrs. Chancellor thinking of me as she does—she has no reason to like me, and imagines me in her way—but *you*, Gertrude, ah! that is very different! Why should I deceive you as to my feelings to Beauchamp; what good would it do me if what Mrs. Chancellor

thinks were true, to conceal it from you? Oh, Gertrude, you know it has been all on his side all along; you cannot say I have ever encouraged him in the very least?"


"No—o," said Gertrude, reluctantly. "*Directly*, you certainly have not done so. But I don't know, Roma. I wish you wouldn't ask me. As Mrs. Chancellor said once, you may have been deceiving yourself."

"I have not then; I have done nothing of the kind," replied Roma, her dark eyes flashing as no light grey ones could do. "I tell you again, Gertrude, as I have told you a hundred times, I do not care for Beauchamp a straw, not in the way you mean. It is a perfect mystery to me what other women find so irresistible in him. I know him too well I suppose. To me he is the very antipodes of the sort of man I could care for. Selfish, weak, vain. He has good qualities too of course, I know that as well or better than you do, but his faults and foibles are the *sort* that in a man I could least forget. There now, have I spoken plainly enough to convince you at last? I

don't want to offend you, Gertrude," seeing that Mrs. Eyrecourt, with true womanly inconsistency, now looked rather sulky at this unflattering depreciation of her Adonis; "you have forced it upon yourself. Good heavens! how unreasonable you are."

"You are forgetting yourself, Roma," said Gertrude, coldly.

"No, I am not. And if I were, would there not be some excuse? I am determined to come to an end of this. Either you must trust me, or if not I will go away. I will be a governess or a housemaid or anything, rather than stay with you if you doubt me. What would you have, Gertrude? You don't want me to marry Beauchamp, yet you are angry because I am not the least atom in love with him? Would you like to be told that I am heart and soul devoted to him, but that to please you I was willing to sacrifice myself by refusing to have anything to say to him—would that be a pleasant state of things for you? I know very little about the feelings of people in love certainly—I have hardly a



right to judge even of myself in such a predicament, but I don't know but what I *might* have been capable of so sacrificing myself, Gertrude, rather than disappoint you after your many years' goodness to me. I am grateful, whatever else I may not be. But such a state of things would have been wretched for you."

Gertrude was touched. The old habit of sisterly trust and confidence was fast returning upon her.

"I do believe you, Roma," she said, after a little silence. "I have never doubted you as much as you think. But it is altogether uncomfortable and anomalous."

"I know it is. For no one more so than for me," replied Miss Eyrecourt. "And my conviction that Beauchamp does not really care for me does not simplify matters. I doubt his being capable of what I call really caring for any one, though I don't know," she added thoughtfully, the expression of his face when he had begged her "never to sing that song again" returning to her memory; "but what can I

do, Gertrude? You don't want me to let him propose formally and hear my opinion of him in the plain words I have told it to you?"

"Certainly not," said Gertrude, hastily. "It would be most disagreeable—just now especially; the Chancellors would hear of it, and—altogether——"

"It would be horrid, I allow," answered Roma, consideringly. "A good blow to Beauchamp's vanity might not do him any harm, but he would never forgive the dealer thereof. We could never be all comfortable together again. As for the Chancellors, I don't know that it would much matter. I don't think there is much chance of success in that quarter, Gertrude. Of course it would be a good marriage for Beauchamp, and he is far more likely to be a good husband rich than poor, and Addie is pretty and amiable. It would be all right if *he* saw it so of course, but I don't think he will. However, I don't want to be in the way. I tell you what, Gertrude, I had better go away."

"Go away!" repeated Mrs. Eyrecourt, in amazement. "Roma, oh no! that would never do."

"I don't mean for always," said Roma. "I am not so in love with independence as to want to leave you unless you drive me to it—for, of course, as Mrs. Chancellor delicately observed, I have 'literally nothing else to look to.' You are my bread and butter you see, Gertrude—for of course the trifle I have is hardly enough to dress upon; and I assure you I don't want to quarrel with you if I can help it." Gertrude winced a little. "If my father's second wife had been an heiress like his first, things would have been different. No, I didn't mean going away for always—only for a few weeks, till Beauchamp is away again."

"He would be sure to suspect the reason and would be angry," objected Mrs. Eyrecourt.

"Not he; I could manage it so that neither he nor any one else could suspect the reason. I shall probably be telegraphed

for in a few days. I had a letter from my godmother this morning, which paves the way beautifully for a sudden summons. She is a good old soul. I shall write to her at once. Beauchamp is all right for the present. He is trying a new plan with me, and before he discovers its vanity I shall be safe out of his way."

"Roma," said Gertrude, penitently, "you are very good and unselfish."

"No, I'm not. Neither the one nor the other," said Roma, cheerfully. Her spirits had quite returned to her now that Gertrude was herself again. "Kiss me, Gertrude, and I will forget that you ever doubted me. What's that noise? Some one listening again? It is certainly not I this time."

She walked quickly to the window and looked out. The glass door was still ajar, but no one was to be seen. "It must have been my fancy," she said, returning to Mrs. Eyrecourt. But just then an unmistakable rustling was heard along the passage. "There is Mrs. Chancellor coming back

again. I must go before she comes in. You won't tell her any of what we have been talking about, Gertrude? You will not let her know of my having overheard what she said?"

"Of course not. How can you ask me, Roma? I shall never mention you to her again at all if I can help it," answered Mrs. Eyrecourt, and almost before she had finished speaking, Roma had disappeared through the glass door, only just in time to escape Adelaide's mother, who entered in great tribulation concerning the non-appearance of the flowers from Foster's, ordered for the completion of Miss Chancellor's ball-dress.

"What to do, I really don't know, my dear Gertrude," she began in a tone of sore distress. "The whole effect of the dress depends upon them. And we have felt anxious about the dress already. Pink is rather an experiment for Adelaide at a ball, for she does flush, you know, and on this account I have hitherto prohibited it. But she had so set her heart upon it I agreed to try it, and I have been trusting to these

flowers—water-lilies, all white, you know—to soften the colour.”

“And has she no other ball-dress ready in case they don’t come?” inquired Mrs. Eyrecourt, not sorry that Mrs. Chancellor’s thoughts were thus diverted from the former subject of their conversation. “I didn’t know she was thinking of pink for to-night—at a Hunt ball, you see, against the scarlet coats——”

“Of course,” interrupted Mrs. Chancellor. “Dear me, that makes it worse and worse! How could Adelaide and Fraser be so stupid? But there is her white tulle. I do believe there would be time to alter the trimming, and it is a lovely dress. Would you, dearest Gertrude, mind coming up with me to look at it? I should be so thankful for your opinion.”

Dearest Gertrude had no objection, and as the two ladies passed along the corridor upstairs, they met Roma coming out of her own room with a book in her hand.

“Can you tell me where the second volume of ‘Arrows in the Dark,’ is to be

found, Gertrude?" she asked innocently, as they passed her.

The slight noise near the window of the boudoir had not after all been Roma's fancy. Eavesdropping was in fashion to-day at Winsley.

When Captain Chancellor had driven Lady Exyton safely home again from the meet, and deposited her at the hall door, she begged him to go round with the ponies to the stable to explain to her groom a little matter in the harness requiring immediate adjustment. His errand accomplished, he strolled back to the house again by a round-about route through the terrace garden. Here he suddenly came upon his niece, intently engaged in ascertaining how many new little worms she could chop up one big one into, her nursemaid, seated on a garden bench at a little distance, being safely engrossed with crochet.

"What are you doing, you nasty cruel little girl?" exclaimed Beauchamp, in considerable disgust.

In a general way Floss rather affected her

uncle : such an address, however, roused all her latent ire.

"I ain't nasty. And you're cwueller to shoot pwetty birds and bunnies. Worms is ugly, and they doesn't mind cutting," she replied, defiantly.

"How do you know? You wouldn't like to be chopped up into little bits, would you?" remonstrated Captain Chancellor, with a vague feeling that somewhere in his memory, could he but lay hold of it, there was a verse of one of Dr. Watts's hymns appropriate to quote on the occasion.

"No," returned Floss calmly, "I wouldn't, 'cause I'm not a worm. Worms doesn't mind. I *know* they doesn't. I know lots of things," she continued, mysteriously peeping up into her uncle's face with her green eyes; "lots and lots that nobody more knows."

"Do you?" said Beauchamp, carelessly. "Let's hear some of your secrets, Floss."

"I'll tell you one if you won't tell nobody," said the child. She was evidently burning to communicate it, or she would not

so quickly have forgiven her uncle's insulting greeting.

"All right, I won't tell nobody."

"Listen, stoop down, Uncle Beachey. Low down; now listen and I'll whisper," said Floss. Then to his amazement—he had expected only some childish confidence or complaint—she whispered into his ear the words, "Aunt Woma's going away."

Beauchamp started back. "Roma is going away," he repeated. "Nonsense, Floss. You don't know what you're talking about."

"I do, I do," exclaimed the child, in her eagerness to prove herself right, throwing all reserve to the winds, "she said so to mamma. I heard her, and mamma said she was good, and I know she's going."

"How did you hear her? Where were you?" questioned Beauchamp."

"I was under the sofa—in there, in mamma's room," said Floss, pointing in the direction of the boudoir. "My ball went in, and I went in too, and mamma thought I came out again, but I didn't. I hid under the sofa for nurse not to see me, and

it was a long time—hours, I should think—before she finded me,” she continued triumphantly.

“But how did you hear your aunt was going away—did nurse tell you?” asked Captain Chancellor, somewhat mystified.

“No, in course not,” exclaimed Floss, contemptuously. “Nurse doesn’t know. Aunt Woma came into the room and spoke lots to mamma. She said she would make something for mamma, but mamma wouldn’t have it; and then she said she would go away, and mamma said she was good, but you would be angwy, and Aunt Woma said, ‘No; you wouldn’t expeck.’”

“‘Wouldn’t expect?’ What can the child mean? Wasn’t it *suspect* she said, Floss?” a brilliant light flashing upon him.

“Yes, suchpeck,” agreed Floss. “It was suchpeck; and what could it be aunt said she’d make for mamma, Uncle Beachey?” she continued, evidently disposed now to regard her hearer as an interpreter of the jumble in her brain. “It was something like *satin flies*.”

Captain Chancellor stared at the child without speaking. He saw, or thought he at last saw, through it all. He turned to go, but a thought occurred to him.

"Floss," he said, very impressively, "it wasn't good of you to listen to what your mamma and aunt were saying. They would be very angry if they knew."

"Oh, don't tell. Uncle Beachey, you said you wouldn't tell nobody," said the little girl beseechingly.

"I'm not going to tell. But remember, Floss, you must be sure not to tell any one else, not nurse or any one, do you hear? It doesn't matter for me, but other people might scold you."

"Then I wont tell," decided Floss. "And do you think Aunty Woma will go away, Uncle Beachey? I hope she will. I like her best when she goes away, for then she can't call me a tiresome plague, and she bwings me a pwesent when she comes back."

But Uncle Beachey did not answer her inquiries. His mind was full of curiously

mingled feelings; indignation against Gertrude, triumph over Roma, whose real sentiments he now imagined he had discovered; determination to be, as he expressed it to himself, "made a fool of no longer." And below all these he was conscious of a strange, indefinable feeling of indifference to it all, of unwillingness to move decisively in the matter, as he told himself he must. Now that the long-coveted prize seemed within his reach, half its attractiveness appeared to have deserted it.

"There has been a great deal of unnecessary to-do about it all," he said to himself. "Of course I always felt sure that in the end I should marry Roma, and I have no doubt we shall get on very well. But it takes the bloom off a thing to have all this uncertainty and delay about it."





CHAPTER II.

PLAIN SPEAKING.

“The fiery maiden-nature flashing forth.”

City Poems.

ROMA'S spirits rose considerably after her conversation with her sister-in-law. She did not look forward with much anticipation of enjoyment to the evening's amusement—balls at four-and-twenty are very different from what they are at eighteen—still she felt more like her usual cheerful sensible self than she had done for some time.

“How *very* pretty your dress is, Miss Eyrecourt,” said Adelaide, cordially, perhaps a little enviously, when the two young ladies happened to find themselves side by side shaking out their plumage after the four miles' drive, in the temporary cloak-room, at the Winsley “Unicorn.” “I do so admire

black, and those foxgloves are really lovely. So very natural! I never saw them worn before. I am not at all pleased with my dress," she went on discontentedly. "I have worn it once before, and I think one never feels comfortable in an old dress. I wish I had had my new pink after all. I don't believe there will be many scarlet coats. Only two of our party have them."

"There are sure to be a good many; and really your dress is exceedingly pretty," replied Roma, consolingly. "It looks perfectly fresh."

"Does it?" said Miss Chancellor, turning herself round, the better to observe the effect of her long sweep of drapery. "I'm glad you think it looks nice. I am engaged for the first dance to Captain Chancellor. I almost wish I wasn't! Do you know, Miss Eyrecourt, though I think he is charming to look at, I cannot get on with him. I never can think of anything to say to him, and yet just see how Miss Fretville goes on with him, and mamma thinks him delightful too."

Roma smiled. "Miss Fretville and you are two very different people," she replied kindly, for the girl's unaffectedness pleased her. "You will find that he dances beautifully, any way, which is the principal consideration to-night. Here he comes," for by this time the whole party were in the ball-room, and the first dance was on the eve of commencing.

Captain Chancellor made his way quickly to where the two girls were standing.

"Our dance, I believe, Miss Chancellor?" he said to his cousin, then, somewhat to Roma's surprise—his late conduct had not prepared her to be thus honoured—he turned towards her.

"Will you keep number ten for me, Roma," he said; "I shall count upon it, remember!" and before, in the moment's hurry, she had time to make any excuse, or even to decide that it would be well to do so, he had left her, and in another minute was whirling round the room, with the substantial Adelaide in his arms.

Miss Eyrecourt felt a little uneasy.

Something in Beauchamp's manner had struck her as peculiar : then, too, number ten was—as she knew by the arrangement of the card—the last dance before supper; evidently he had chosen it on purpose. There was no help for it, however ; she must trust to her tact to steer clear of anything undesirable, but she almost wished she had pleaded illness or some excuse, and remained at home.

What a pity it all was ! Long ago in the old comfortable days, how she had enjoyed dancing with Beauchamp, especially at these Winsley balls, where they knew everybody, and it was sociable and friendly, and people were not too fine to enjoy themselves. How nice it would be, thought Roma, if there was no such thing in the world as falling in love, real or imaginary.

Could it be true, as Beauchamp had so often told her, when he was vexed, that she was different from the rest of young ladyhood, cold, and self-contained and unwomanly ? If so, was it not a pity she had not taken the best that came in her way, with-

out waiting in a vague belief that something better might possibly be yet to come? Portionless though she was, she had refused two or three very fair proposals before now, refused them for no reason except the little-sympathised-in one that she "did not care for" the men who had made them to her. But now, at four-and-twenty, there were times when she questioned the wisdom of her decisions, when she doubted if, after all, it was in her to care for any real flesh-and-blood lover, as long ago in the romantic girlish days it had seemed to her she could. She might have been fairly happy with Sir Philip Bartlemore for instance, buried in politics over head and ears though he was. Lady Bartlemore seemed comfortable and content, and every one spoke of her as fortunate in her married life; or with that undoubtedly disinterested and truly uninteresting Mr. Fawcett, the Rector of Ferrivale, towards whom for some time Roma had vainly tried to coax into existence a warmer sentiment than respect—she would have gone on respecting him till now, she

felt quite sure, and she would have had a home and ties of her own, whereas now she was of no particular use to any one, and the cause of disunion and trouble among her nearest friends. Had she made a mistake in not acting up to the practical, worldly-wise philosophy she always professed to believe in? There was no saying, and little use now in trying to decide; so Roma turned her attention to the present, danced as much as she felt inclined, laughed and talked with such of her partners as were worth the trouble, and made fun to herself of the others, till nine dances had come to an end, and she was startled by Beauchamp's voice beside her claiming her for the tenth.

"I am glad it is a waltz," she said cordially, judging that a return to the old easy terms would be her best temporary policy. "It is ages since we have had one together, and we understood each other's paces so well. I have not been very lucky to-night; so far as dancing goes, that is to say. My partners have belonged more to

the order of 'those that talk.' How have you been getting on?"

"I! oh, I don't know. Well enough," replied Captain Chancellor somewhat absently. "Lady Exyton dances well to look at, but she's rather *too* light and too small for me. Blanche Fretville again is a thought too big, and she bounces rather."

"You are as difficult to please as ever, I see," remarked Roma, rashly.

Beauchamp looked at her: his eyes and the consciousness of the mistake she had made, caused her colour to deepen. Her vexation with herself increased.

"Yes," he replied, quietly, but with meaning in his tone, "I am. No one should know that better than you, Roma."

Just then, to her relief, the music began. "Are you ready?" he asked, and in a moment they were off.

It is something for poor creatures such as most of us are, to be able to do anything perfectly, even so altogether small a thing as dancing! There is a real satisfaction while it lasts, in feeling that the thing we

are doing could not be done better. And this agreeable consciousness was always Roma's when waltzing with Beauchamp. They were a perfectly well-matched pair ; their movements as harmonious as the blending of two voices in a duet. Once, long ago, Roma had said to Beauchamp that whatever he had done to offend her, it would be beyond her power to refuse to forgive him after dancing with him. It had been a passing laughing remark, and he had forgotten its ever having been made. Still, some instinctive desire to gain for himself every possible advantage in what was before him, had probably had to do with the details of his conduct this evening.

The waltz came to an end—all too soon, for more reasons than one, for Roma. She had not been able to make any plan of defence ; she could only trust to her tact and quick-wittedness. Captain Chancellor seemed in no hurry to get rid of her. She was afraid of appearing anxious to leave him ; symptoms of such a feeling on her part might only precipitate what she hoped

to evade. So they promenaded up and down the room among all the other couples, saying little to each other, Roma all alert for the first chance of escape. Suddenly a door hitherto closed was thrown open; a general movement in the new direction ensued. Beauchamp started.

"Supper!" he exclaimed. "By-the-bye, I forgot. Will you excuse me, Roma, for a moment?"

She was only too ready; her hand was withdrawn from his arm almost before the words were out of his mouth.

"Never mind about me," she said quickly. "I see Gertrude over there. I can make my way to her quite well alone."

She did not know if he heard what she had said or not, in a moment he had disappeared. And, alas! for the vanity of human expectations, Gertrude was no longer to be seen "over there." Nearly every one had by this time left the ball-room; the few who were still in process of filing out were not of Roma's acquaintances. She began to feel rather uncomfortable and deserted, and a

little indignant with Beauchamp. One or two couples glanced at her as they passed, with some surprise.

"What can Miss Eyrecourt be standing there alone for?" said a girl who knew her by name only, to the gentleman she was with.

"Better ask Captain Chancellor," replied the young man. He was the son of one of the managers, formerly head clerk, of the Winsley Bank, and his acquaintance with the "county" was decidedly limited. As might have been expected therefore, his knowledge of its private arrangements was minute in the extreme, now and then indeed suggesting suspicions of clairvoyance.

"Who is he?" asked the girl, a stranger to the neighbourhood, to whom five minutes before Mr. Thompson had pointed out Miss Eyrecourt, condescendingly, as "one of our belles—has been, that is to say."

"He is a sort of a connection of hers," he replied, "that is to say, a brother of Mrs. Eyrecourt's. He and she—Captain Chancellor and Miss Eyrecourt, are engaged to be

married, though it is not *generally* known. There he is," he added, lowering his voice, for at that moment, as if in confirmation of his statement, Beauchamp, conspicuous by running against the supper-seeking stream, passed them, on his way back to the ball-room.

"Oh, indeed!" replied Miss Smith, with the sex's usual keen interest in such matters. "I am glad you told me. It is such fun to watch engaged people."

She communicated the fact in all good faith to her next partner, who happened to be one of the officers in the cavalry regiment stationed in the neighbouring town. This gentleman, not personally acquainted with either of the two people it chiefly concerned, mentioned it again casually as an undoubtedly well-authenticated piece of local news to a brother officer, whose wife, an old school-friend of Mrs. Dalrymple's, happened to be writing to that lady the next day. The object of her letter being to ask for an introduction to the family at Winsley Grange, the major's wife naturally alluded to the en-

gagement as a "just announced" occurrence, not forgetting, on the principle of "the three black crows," to add, what she probably really thought she had been told, that "she understood the marriage was to take place almost immediately."

Roma was sitting quite alone in the empty ball-room, when, to her great surprise, Beauchamp rejoined her. She had not liked his deserting her so unceremoniously, but this unexpected reappearance alarmed her: still she determined to seem to suspect nothing out of the common.

"So you haven't forgotten me after all, Beauchamp?" she said good-humouredly. "You needn't have come back for me though, I don't care about any supper."

"Don't you really? Come now, that's quite a fortunate coincidence," said Captain Chancellor, seating himself deliberately beside her, "for as it happens I don't want any either. We can spend the interval that less ethereal beings than you and I, Roma, devote to vulgar eating and drinking in a little congenial conversation."

“But your partner?” objected Roma; “that is to say, the lady you took in to supper. What will she be thinking of you?”

“I didn’t take any one in to supper,” replied Captain Chancellor, composedly. “The reason I deserted you so unceremoniously was only that I had promised Lady Exyton to tell Vandeleur where she was to be found, and I had forgotten.”

Roma, who was really rather hungry, began to long for the comparative safety of the crowded supper-room. How she wished now she had not told that useless little fib about not wanting anything to eat.

“What is the matter?” asked Beauchamp, presently. “What are you looking so unhappy about?”

“I am tired,” she answered hastily. “I have got a little headache. I wish I could get a cup of tea, but I suppose there would be no chance of such a thing so late in the evening.”

“Every chance,” replied he; and for one happy moment Miss Eyrecourt thought he was going to volunteer an expedition in

search of it. "If you will wait till the supper is over I will guarantee your getting it. I am so sorry you are tired, Roma, but I have not thought you looking well for some time. You may have fancied I did not notice your looks or think about you, but if so you have been mistaken."

There was the unmistakable tone of a prelude in this little speech. Roma grew desperate, as a last hope she tried to offend him.

"I am not obliged to you for noticing my looks," she said haughtily—"still less for commenting upon them. There are few things I dislike more than remarks of the kind. I am tired, as I told you, Beauchamp, and I want to sit here quietly by myself. It will oblige me very much if you will go away and leave me alone."

Captain Chancellor had risen from his seat and stood before her, looking down on her flushed face, waiting quietly till she had come to the end of her not very civil speech. He was perfectly cool. Roma hardly understood the expression of his face, but she felt

that, so far at least in the interview, he had the advantage of her.

"You needn't think you will make me angry, and get rid of me in that way, Roma," he said coolly. "You have tried that plan successfully several times, but I understand you better now, I am glad to say. Yes, I understand you thoroughly now at last, and I will have no more mystifications and shilly-shallying."

It was a peculiar sort of love-making. There was a tone of triumph in his way of speaking that irritated Miss Eyrecourt even while it bewildered her.

"What do you mean, Beauchamp?" she asked, really at a loss to understand what he was driving at.

"You know what I mean," he answered; and Roma could see that he put some force on himself to keep down his rising irritation. "You know perfectly what I mean. Not many hours ago you told Gertrude you were willing to make a sacrifice of yourself for her" (this was what after much cogitation Captain Chancellor had made out of Floss's

“satin flies,” and the look of utter astonishment on Roma’s face told him that his shot had hit the mark) ; “ have you forgotten that you were sacrificing some one else as well as yourself? All these years, Roma, I have waited, if not always patiently, at least, more so than many men would have done ” (“ yes,” thought Roma, “and amused yourself very agreeably between times,”) “ and now I think I deserve my reward. I have always suspected what I now know, that Gertrude was the real difficulty ; but for this suspicion your conduct would certainly have been most incomprehensible to me, still till to-day I hardly realised that she could carry her unjustifiable tyranny so far, or that you could so tamely yield to it.”

Here and there during this speech Roma had softened a little to her would-be lover, had even pitied him a little when it dawned upon her that the truth she had no option now but to tell him in unmistakable words might after all cause him some real pain : but the confident belief in the irresistible nature of his own charms, calmly inferred in

his closing words, provoked her out of such weakness. She felt no difficulty now in hardening her heart.

"How you have got your knowledge, Beauchamp, of what passed between Gertrude and me to-day certainly baffles my comprehension; but, however you have done so, you must allow me to tell you that it is a very garbled version of the real conversation that has come to you," began Roma.

"I don't believe it," interrupted the young man, hotly. "You are trying to mystify me again. Can you deny that Gertrude's interference has gone the length of driving you from Winsley while I am there?"

"Certainly I deny it," she replied. "It is perfectly true that Gertrude and I agreed together that it would not be unadvisable for me to leave Winsley for a time."

"For the time of my being there?" he interrupted again.

"Well, yes, if you force me to say so, that was the time we proposed for my absence. But *Gertrude* was not the originator of the plan. It was my own wish."

"Indeed !" he said, incredulously. "And if not to propitiate Gertrude, what on earth was your motive?"

"The foolish one," she returned, getting very angry, "of wishing to spare myself the pain of saying, and you the pain—or rather, perhaps, I should say, the mortification, of hearing what I would much rather never have been driven to put into words."

"And what may that be?" he asked, growing paler than was his wont, but with a sneer on his face that made Roma, in her exaggerated indignation, marvel that ever she could have thought him handsome.

"The truth," she replied, vehemently, "the plain state of the case—namely, that there is one woman who does *not* think you irresistible; who would not marry you, hardly, I think, to save her life; who pities the woman that does marry you—vain, selfish, shallow as you are!" She stopped, breathless with excitement.

"Thank you," said Beauchamp. He was still standing before her, to all outward appearance composedly enough, but still with

the same disfiguring sneer over his handsome features. "Thank you," he repeated, slowly. "One is never too old to learn, I suppose. I thought I knew something of women; till to-night I thought I knew something of *you*—I imagined you refined, gentle, and womanly, but you have undeceived me. Still, of course, pray understand how sincerely I thank you for your plain speaking; the only pity is that you have so long deferred it, out of regard, no doubt, for the pain—oh no, by-the-bye, I am too shallow to be capable of feeling pain, mortification I think you kindly called it—it might cause me."

He turned to go. The intensity of wounded feeling from which he was suffering, the utter unexpectedness of the blow, had given him for the time a sort of dignity, a power of retort new to him. Never before, perhaps, had Roma been so near admiring him as now, when the mixture of truth in his sarcastic words stung her so deeply. A sort of remorse seized upon her—she felt that she had gone too far. Poor

Beauchamp! he might be all she had taunted him with being, but had he deserved such treatment at her hands?

"Beauchamp," she exclaimed, appealingly, "Beauchamp, don't go like that. Forgive me. I have said more than I meant. You have been mistaken all along. You don't really care for me in *that* way. Some day you will see you have never done so. Oh, do let us be friends in the old way; you don't know how I wish it!"

At the first sound of her voice he had stopped short and half turned round. A foolish, wild idea flashed through his mind that possibly he had been premature in believing her, that now at the last moment, when she judged him all but lost to her, he was yet to see this proud woman at his feet. But in a moment her words undeceived him.

"Thank you again," he said, coming nearer her, and speaking in a low voice, for just then some of the younger people—those who cared more for dancing than supper—began to straggle back into the ball-room,

“but you must excuse me for saying—as plain speaking is the order of the day—that I can’t echo your wish. Even ‘vain, selfish, shallow’ people have feelings, you know, sometimes, of a kind.” Then, with a complete and sudden change of voice, he added aloud, “Shall we go to the supper-room now, and see what we can get? It must be getting less crowded.” And with the habitual instinct of not leaving the woman in an awkward or unprotected position, he offered Roma his arm, which she, wounded beyond expression, yet not without a certain feeling of gratitude for his consideration, was fain to accept.

Surely a more uncomfortable pair never walked arm-in-arm across a ball-room! They made their way in silence, meeting of course face to face the returning stream, feeling themselves agreeably exposed to the critical remarks of the many to whom, at least by sight, they were well known. Entering the supper-room, to her relief, Roma descried Gertrude and some of her party still seated in a corner, and she lost no time

in joining them with some plausible excuse for her tardy appearance. But it is to be feared she never got the cup of tea on which she had so set her heart.

The rest of the evening passed like a dreary farce. It was all Roma could do to smile and talk sufficiently as usual to prevent Mrs. Eyrecourt's suspicions being aroused; for as yet she could not decide how much or how little of what had passed it would be well for her to confide to her sister-in-law. She felt unspeakably thankful when at last she found herself at home again, safe in the solitude of her own room, free to think over quietly the painful occurrences of the evening, and to decide what now was best for her to do. But when she tried to think it all over she found herself too tired and dispirited to do so reasonably or sensibly; worse still, when she gave up the attempt and went to bed, she could not sleep, and when, after tossing about for two or three hours, she at last fell into an uneasy doze, it was only to awake with a start and the indescribably wretched feeling fami-

liar to us all that something was the matter, and that she must at once arouse her faculties to recall its details.

Light was beginning to break, however ; she found she must have slept longer than she had imagined. Yes ; it was nearly eight o'clock. She got up and dressed without ringing for her maid, who had sat up late for her the night before, and thinking that the fresh morning air might refresh her, she spent the next hour in a brisk walk round the park.

When she came in again, and was hastening to take off her hat and cloak, she passed Captain Chancellor's room. The door was open, and just inside she caught sight of his man-servant engaged in strapping a portmanteau. Roma stopped short ; the servant happening to look up, perceived her standing in the doorway.

"What time is your master leaving, Barlow?" she asked, coolly, as if she knew all about it.

"Half-past ten, ma'am," was the reply. "At least, the dog-cart is ordered for then."

Roma passed on to her own room, feeling very unhappy. She had no anticipation of Beauchamp's acting so precipitately, and she could not bear to be, even unwillingly, the cause of annoyance and vexation to her sister-in-law. What could she do? There was no use trying to see Gertrude, she would certainly not be awake enough to take it all in, and persuade her brother to reconsider his plans. Much as she shrank from seeing Captain Chancellor again, Roma now wished she could do so; there was just a possibility that she might be able to stop his leaving so hastily, especially if she reminded him of her own determination to go away from Winsley for a time. She went down to the dining-room with a half-formed determination to try what she could do. None of the guests had as yet made their appearance, but at one end of the long table stood a cup of coffee already poured out, and other signs that some one intended breakfasting at once. It did not look promising. Miss Eyrecourt hung about uncertain what to do, but just as she

was deciding that it would be better for her not to interfere, Captain Chancellor walked in.

For the first moment he did not see her, but sat down hastily to his breakfast. Then happening to look up, he caught sight of her, and started visibly. Roma felt very uncomfortable; till she was actually in it she had not realised the awkwardness of the position. Now, however, her good sense came to her aid.

"Beauchamp," she said, trying to speak as much as possible as usual, though her voice trembled a little, "I want to ask you something."

"Be so kind as to tell me what it is as quickly as possible," he said, stiffly. "I am leaving immediately."

"There are two things I want to ask you," she went on hurriedly. "The first is, will you forgive me for having hurt you more than I need have done last night. I don't suppose I could have avoided hurting you to some extent, but what I had to say I might have said differently. In short,

Beauchamp, I am afraid now that I lost my temper, and I am very sorry for it."

"The provocation was certainly very great," returned Captain Chancellor, bitterly. "Still you must excuse me for saying that I do not see any need for the subject's ever being reverted to again. We are not likely, you will be glad to hear, to see much more of each other for the future: it is not much to ask you to drop the subject now and for ever."

Roma's face flushed. "I only wish I could forget it at once and for ever," she answered with much hurt feeling in her tone. "It is far from generous for you to answer me so." Beauchamp remained perfectly silent. "However," she continued, "I cannot believe that you will continue to feel so bitter as you do now. What I most wanted to see you for was to beg you not to leave so hastily. There is no need for it. *I* am going away in a day or two. It will be very hard upon me if you go away in this sudden way, for of course, Gertrude will be

frightfully annoyed, and altogether it will be most disagreeable."

She purposely exaggerated her personal feeling in the matter, as, under the circumstances, the strongest appeal she could make to him.

Captain Chancellor looked up quickly. "I am not surprised you should think so of me," he said; "but you are mistaken. I explained everything to Gertrude last night; she knows of my leaving. She is most anxious you should not think of going away at present, as she will tell you herself. But my time is up. I must go."

He rose from his seat.

"Are you going back to Wareborough?" asked Roma, feeling remorseful and yet indignant.

"Certainly not," he answered sharply, evidently suspecting some meaning in her question. "Wareborough is about the last place I am likely to go to—wretched hole that it is. I am only too thankful to have seen the last of it."

He spoke, it seemed to Roma, with un-

necessary vehemence. But there was no time for anything more to be said. He shook hands formally and was off, and Roma walked slowly upstairs again to her own room, vexed with herself, vexed with Beauchamp, yet sorry for both.

Half-an-hour later Gertrude sent for her. Mrs. Eyrecourt was wonderfully gracious. "It is very unlucky, dear—dreadfully unlucky, just what we have all along dreaded so, but most certainly not your fault. And I don't think there will be any fuss about it. Beauchamp said something 'confidentially' to Mrs. Chancellor last night about the probability of his being called away suddenly by letters this morning. A friend of his—that Major Thanet, you know, Roma, really is ill—at Torquay or somewhere, and Beauchamp will most likely join him. And he has promised to visit the Chancellors at Wylingham very soon. So after all it may all turn out for the best. They leave tomorrow. And I have been thinking, Roma, considering all—you will be the better of a change, and of course you won't go to Deep-

thorne now—I don't see why we should not go to town sooner than we intended. We can have that house in a fortnight for either two or three months."

"Very well," said Roma. "I am quite willing to do as you like." Then, after a moment's silence she added, "I am glad Beauchamp is not going back to Wareborough. I was a little afraid of that at first."

"Of what?" asked Gertrude, lifting her eyebrows. Then as a remembrance of Roma's former fears returned to her mind, "On account of that girl, do you mean? Oh dear no, I have no fears in that quarter now. You must have exaggerated what you noticed when you were there."

"Perhaps so," said Roma, quietly.





CHAPTER III.

AT WAREBOROUGH.

"The certainty that struck hope dead."—J. RUSKIN.

THESE three weeks had passed drearily enough at Wareborough. Not with everybody, of course. Frank Thurston for one was in a far from unhappy state of mind—his marriage with Sydney Laurence was to take place in a few weeks; thanks to Gerald's generosity no difficulties had come in its way, and the prospects of the young people were bright enough to satisfy all reasonable requirements. Sydney, in her calm way, was happy too. She belonged to the class of women who to some extent identify the husband with the home, and the selecting of this home, the discussion of the rival merits of the two or three little houses which happened at the time to be vacant in

that part of Wareborough where they were to live, was deeply interesting to her. Still more delightful to her was the furnishing and adorning of the tiny habitation. Her taste was good, her common sense and discrimination wonderful, and she had the happy knack of never apparently opposing her lover, even when his ideas as to the drawing-room curtains, or china dinner-service, hardly accorded with what she considered suitable, or threatened to exceed the sums respectively appropriated to these purposes. Yet in the end and without the exercise of any conscious diplomacy, Sydney generally got her own way. Eugenia on these occasions wondered at, admired, often almost lost patience with her sister.

"You are really spoiling Frank, Sydney," she would say. "I don't believe he half appreciates you."

But "Oh, yes, he does," Sydney would answer with a quiet smile, for nothing that Eugenia could have said in those days would have had power to draw forth any but the gentlest reply from the sister whose

whole soul was filled with an intensity of unexpressed, inexpressible sympathy in the suffering which Eugenia was doing her utmost to conceal.

Since the night when they had learnt the certainty of Captain Chancellor's departure, his name had never been even indirectly alluded to by Eugenia. It was not that she was naturally reserved or too proud to confide in her sister, but just at the first shock she felt that her only strength lay in silence—once let the barriers of her reticence be broken down, she trembled for her already overtaxed powers of self-control. And besides she shrank from the not improbably adverse view which Sydney might take of Captain Chancellor's behaviour.

"She does not know him as I do; she could not understand him," thought Eugenia. "I could not, even by her, endure to hear him blamed or judged in the common conventional way, for whatever others might think of him, I believe him to be blameless. My faith in him is unshaken."

And so she believed it to be, not discerning that in this morbid shrinking from any discussion of the subject even with Sydney, there lay concealed an unacknowledged misgiving as to the soundness of the foundations of her trust.

So she kept silence, and flattered herself that no one but Sydney could possibly suspect that anything was amiss. It was not difficult for her just at present to keep a little more than usual in the background, the young fiancée being naturally the nine days' centre of observation. And even if Miss Laurence did look hardily in her ordinary spirits, people did not much wonder at it.

"It must be a trial to the two sisters, especially to Miss Laurence, poor girl, to think of being parted, even though Mrs. Frank Thurston, that is to be, will only be a few streets off," observed one kindly-hearted Wareborough matron to Mrs. Dalrymple during a morning call when the Laurence family happened to come on the tapis; to which Mrs. Dalrymple, who was feeling any-

thing but happy about Eugenia's altered looks, agreed with almost suspicious eagerness. For Mr. Dalrymple, with true masculine magnanimity, had already given symptoms of having a stock of "I told you sos" in readiness for the first suitable opportunity, and had Eugenia been less pre-occupied, her friend's increasingly demonstrative affection and constant reiteration of "how *very* well she was looking," could not but have roused the girl's own suspicions.

Curiously enough, in these days Eugenia seemed to turn with satisfaction to Gerald Thurston.

"How very much Gerald has improved again of late," she remarked one day naïvely to Sydney. "For some time after he came home, I thought India had spoilt him. He seemed rough and careless, as if he had got out of the way of women's society, and was turning into a moody old bachelor. But now he has got back his nice, gentle, understanding way. He seems to know by instinct when, when—" she stopped and hesitated—"when Frank and

his chattering are almost more than I can bear," had been in her thoughts, but she recollected herself in time to change it—"when one is tired and disinclined to talk or anything," she said, wearily, and Sydney had hard work to force back the expression of sympathy which she felt would not at this stage be welcome.

"Yes," she answered simply, "Gerald is very good and kind."

She would not have been the least offended had Eugenia finished her sentence as had been on her tongue. How she pitied her no words could have told, and many a time Frank's unconscious cheerfulness jarred even on Sydney herself, poor child, feeling almost as if the contrast of her own happy content was a crime against Eugenia's shattered hopes.

She pitied Gerald too. It was worse for him now, she said to herself, than if all had been as she had expected. True, he might then have realized more acutely the sharpness of his disappointment, have suffered unselfishly from his misgivings as to the worthiness of

her choice ; “ but still,” thought Sydney, in her sensible way, “ it would have been over and certain—a thing that was to be, and he would have been beginning to get accustomed to it.”

But now though Eugenia in the body was still among them, the heart and soul—the very life it seemed just now, had gone out of her. All the freshness and brightness had been sacrificed—whatever possibilities the far-off future might yet conceal, the Eugenia of Gerald’s first love, the Eugenia of his absent dreams, was gone for ever, could never be his. She *had* never been his, it was true, but Sydney’s womanish faith in the “ what would have been,” was indefensibly great. Correspondingly deep was her unspoken disappointment, her vehement, almost fierce indignation against the cause of all this trouble, the wanton destroyer of her sister’s youth and happiness. Had she come upon the subject with Frank, he would, she knew, have either refused to believe in Eugenia’s suffering, or have blamed her as herself the originator of it.

“But he doesn’t understand her, and that man threw dust in his eyes. Supposing even that Eugenia *was* easily deceived, allowing her to be, as Franks says, impressionable and extreme, does that excuse *him*; cold-hearted, unprincipled, selfish man of the world that he must be, to have robbed my darling of her happiness.”

But all these feelings, little suspected under her quiet exterior, Sydney kept to herself.

Late one afternoon, about six weeks after Captain Chancellor had left Wareborough, the sisters on their way home from a long and rather fatiguing shopping expedition, happened to pass Barnwood Terrace.

“Don’t you think we might go in and see Mrs. Dalrymple for a few minutes?” suggested Sydney. “She has been twice to see us since we have called on her, and she is always so kind.”

“Very well; if you like I don’t care,” replied Eugenia, and Sydney hastened to ring the bell before she could change her mind. The girl was jealous for her sister

that no occasion should be given for either kindly or spiteful gossip, and it was well for Eugenia that she had so discriminating a friend at hand ; for in the preoccupation of her perplexity and trouble, it would never have occurred to her that any regard should be paid to the possible comments of the little outside Wareborough world.

Mrs. Dalrymple was at home, and as cordially delighted as usual to see her two friends, yet Sydney was at once conscious of a slight underlying constraint in her manner, perceptible chiefly perhaps in the kind-hearted woman's extra effusiveness and palpable endeavour to be quite as easy and cheerful as her wont.

"She has something on her mind," thought Sydney, "something she is uncertain about telling us," for the girl had no great opinion of Mrs. Dalrymple's power of reserve, and every time that their hostess introduced a new subject of conversation Sydney trembled, she hardly knew why, and glanced furtively in her sister's direction. Eugenia sat quietly, unconscious of anything unusual

in Mrs. Dalrymple's demeanour, now and then putting in a remark on one or other of the various topics touched upon. She was at that stage of very youthful suffering at which a sort of calm often falls upon the inexperienced subject of it; in reality a simple physical reaction, but which she told herself, with a childish yet morbid satisfaction, must be "the apathy of despair." Her life, she told herself, was over; she had sounded the very depths of suffering, she had experienced the worst, the very worst; only one possible aggravation of what she had endured was conceivable to her; yet not so either, for her heart refused to listen to the faintest suggestion of so monstrous an idea as that of her having been deceived in her hero. Could it be possible that he had never been "in earnest," that he did not really care for her, that the softly hinting words and looks more eloquent than words had meant nothing? Oh no, no, it could not be; though all the world should swear it to her, she would refuse to believe it.

"For if I ever came to think so, I should

die," she said to herself, with the innocent arrogance of youth which cannot believe that ever a human being's sufferings equalled its own, or that the worst anguish is not that which kills, but that which is lived through. For in those natures which have the deepest capacity for suffering there is usually an appalling reserve of strength and endurance, and to such, dying is not so easy of achievement, as, fresh from their baptism of woe, they are apt to imagine. And Eugenia did not yet know either that there is a "living," compared to which this ignorantly invoked "dying,"— a girl's hazy, sentimental notion of it, that is to say—were but child's play.

So Eugenia sat quietly beside Sydney in Mrs. Dalrymple's luxurious drawing-room—a room full of associations to her—calm in the belief that she had known the worst; that her unapproachable, unsurpassable sorrow had, as it were, set her apart from the rest of the world; that for the future the only life remaining for her was that of unselfish, self-devoting interest in the lives and

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interests of others. For this was the rôle that Eugenia, ever extreme, imaginative, and incapable of the sometimes so salutary resting on one's oars, the taking one's life and its lessons day by day soberly and trustingly, instead of insisting on unravelling the tangled thread oneself—had now already marked out for herself, and, true to her new ideal, she tried to listen with interest to Mrs. Dalrymple's commonplacisms, to answer brightly and smile cheerfully at the proper times. She imagined the shock to be over, the doomed limb already severed, and that she had known the acutest agony; when, alas, she woke from this dream to find that the worst was yet to come, that what she had endured was but the first shrinking of the tender flesh from the cold steel of the surgeon's knife.

Her attention, in spite of her efforts, had flagged a little; she was recalling in fancy the many times Beauchamp Chancellor and she had been together in this room, from that first evening that now seemed so long ago, when he had found her standing alone at the

door in the fog, and had asked her to dance without knowing her name. Suddenly something that Mrs. Dalrymple was saying recalled her to the present. Their hostess had been asking Sydney, as her intimacy with the girls excused her in doing, some questions as to the proposed arrangements for her marriage.

"I do hope it will be fine weather at the time," she had been saying. "Not merely on the day itself, of course, though one naturally likes some sunshine for a bride, but for the honeymoon. You will enjoy your tour so much more if it is fine."

"Yes," agreed Sydney. "But of that we must take our chance. April is never to be counted on."

"No, and yet it is such a favourite month for marriages," replied Mrs. Dalrymple. "I hear of—let me see—three among my near friends, which are fixed for this April,—a niece of Henry's, one of the Conroys. I forget if you have ever met them here? She is marrying a Mr. Mildmay Jones, in the Civil Service, and going out

to India. Then there is your marriage, Sydney, and another I only heard of yesterday. You remember my cousin Roma, Roma Eyrecourt" (here it was that Eugenia's attention was attracted), "of course you do—she was here last December, you know."

She stopped, as if waiting for Sydney's reply, for to her the question had been addressed. In reality, poor woman, she felt unable to screw up her courage to make the announcement which she yet knew it would be cruel and impossible to withhold.

Little shivers of cold began to creep over Sydney. She felt inclined to shake Mrs. Dalrymple—why could she not either have held her tongue or said it out quickly without this unnecessary torture of suspense? For Eugenia was listening: there she sat, Sydney seemed to see without looking at her, in an unnatural tension of expectation, her eyes, which had somehow grown to look larger of late, fixed on the speaker.

"No," said Sydney, in a weak, faint, almost querulous voice, quite unlike her own.

"No, I *don't* know her. I didn't see her when she was here."

"Ah, no, by-the-bye you didn't," said Mrs. Dalrymple, and something kept her from turning to Eugenia, the one who did know her cousin, as would have been natural "I remember. But though you don't know her, you know Captain Chancellor very well. I can't tell you how surprised I was to hear of those two being really engaged. Of course it has often been spoken of, but I long ago made up my mind it would never be. I could get no satisfaction out of Roma when she was here, but I certainly didn't think it looked like it. Beauchamp Chancellor never gave me the slightest reason to expect it—rather the other way indeed. Really I don't think I ever was so surprised."

"And the marriage is to take place very soon, I think you said," inquired Sydney, with the same strange sensation she had had once before of being a mere machine asking questions at her sister's bidding.

"Yes, very soon, I believe," Mrs. Dalrymple went on again in the same nervous,

hurried manner. "Next month—about the same time as yours. I have not heard the whole particulars yet. My letter was not from Roma herself, but from Mrs. Winter, a friend of mine who is staying near there just now. I must write and congratulate them both, I suppose, though—I hope they won't ask us to the marriage, however; I certainly don't want to go."

There was silence for a few moments. Then both Mrs. Dalrymple and Sydney were startled by the sound of Eugenia's voice. She spoke in a quiet, rather dreamy tone, as if the sense of her words was hardly realised by her—but of the peculiarity of her manner only Sydney was aware.


"Will you kindly give our congratulations too, when you write, Mrs. Dalrymple, please—mine especially. I saw Miss Eyrecourt several times, and we all know Captain Chancellor very well, you know."

"Certainly I will, my dear Eugenia, with the greatest pleasure," replied Mrs. Dalrymple, with rather injudicious empressment. A very little encouragement would

have drawn out the whole of her smouldering indignation against Beauchamp and womanly fellow-feeling with Eugenia's wrongs, but without some hint from the sisters that the expression of her opinion would not be considered indelicate or intrusive, even Mrs. Dalrymple felt that in this case, as in most others, the less said the better, and held her peace accordingly.

A minute or two passed, but no more allusion was made to the news which had so disturbed their hostess's equilibrium. And before there was opportunity for the discussion of any other subject, the sisters, moved by a common instinct, discovered that it was getting late, and that they had already outstayed their time. Mrs. Dalrymple could not resist kissing them both affectionately as they said good-bye, but this was the only expression of sympathy on which she ventured.

It was already twilight out of doors. Still not so dusk but that Sydney stole timid glances at her sister's face in wistful anxiety as to what there might be there to read. But it seemed all blank : she might have



stared at her with open inquiry, Eugenia would have been unconscious of it. She walked along quite quietly, replying mechanically to the little commonplace observations Sydney hazarded from time to time; but for the curious expression, or rather curious absence of expression in her usually changeful, speaking face, her sister would have suspected nothing but that Eugenia was in a more than usually silent mood this evening. As it was, Sydney felt bewildered and uncertain, vaguely apprehensive, yet not satisfied that there was new cause for any increase of her anxiety.

"Possibly," thought Sydney, "this definite news may do her good. It may show her what a poor creature he is after all, and may rouse her to shake herself free of the remembrance of him altogether."

She hardly understood that to Eugenia such a reaction, healthy and "sensible" though it might be, was impossible. Through all her despair and misery Eugenia clung with instinctive self-regard to her delusion; over and over again she repeated to herself

in almost the same words, the poor little formula of faith in her lover which she told herself and really imagined she believed. It was her safeguard at this time, and well for her that she could hold to it; for what to some girls would have been merely a passing though sharp mortification, would to her have been a loss of self-respect extensive enough to have shaken the whole foundations of her character.

Very near their own house the sisters were overtaken by Frank Thurston. He walked beside them to the door, but seemed to hesitate about entering.


"Aren't you coming in, Frank?" asked Sydney.

"It is hardly worth while," he replied, eyeing regretfully his but half consumed cigar. "I have only five minutes to spare. Suppose you walk up and down with me, Sydney, instead of my coming in. It's going to be a beautiful evening."

Sydney glanced at Eugenia.

"Yes, do, Sydney," said Eugenia.

Sydney fancied she could discern in this



a longing on her sister's part to be alone, if but for a quarter of an hour.

"Very well, then, I will stay out with you for a little, Frank," she agreed, and Eugenia entered the house by herself.

When she got into the hall, for the first time she became conscious of feeling different from usual, strangely weak and giddy and very cold. Afraid of the servant's observing anything amiss, she abandoned her intention of rushing upstairs at once to her own room, and went instead to the drawing-room, where she knew she would find no one. There was no light in the room but that of a large, brightly burning fire. Eugenia drew a low seat close to it, and in a minute or two when the warmth had penetrated a little through her thick dress, she seemed to feel better. Still, however, she was only half restored; she felt that going upstairs would be quite beyond her powers, so she sat still, vaguely relieved that Sydney did not appear with kindly but unendurable expressions of anxiety as to what was wrong.

How long she had sat there she did not

know, when the door opened quietly and some one came in. Eugenia looked up. It was not Sydney. It was Gerald Thurston!

"Oh," thought poor Eugenia, "oh, if only I were up in my own room! Oh, how can I sit and talk to Gerald!"

Then, however, there came a slight sensation of relief that it was Gerald and not Frank! She stood up to shake hands as usual when he crossed the room to where she was, but the giddy feeling returned, and she sat down again rather abruptly.

"I have been with your father in his study for the last hour," explained Gerald. "He has asked me to stay to dinner and go with him to his lecture at Marny Mills to-night, so you must excuse my clothes."

"Oh, certainly," said Eugenia, smiling.

"It wants more than half-an-hour to dinner-time still," Gerald went on, speaking faster than usual—the truth being that this tête-à-tête with Eugenia, the first since the memorable evening of his return, was by no means to his taste—"don't let me be in your way. I should not have come into the

drawing-room, but your father had some letters to write, and I thought I was in *his* way. I met Sydney flying upstairs as I came across the hall, and she told me I should find a book and a fire in here."

"There are some library books and new magazines over there on that side-table," replied Eugenia, moving her head in the direction she meant. "But you are not in my way," she went on indifferently. "I wasn't doing anything."

She shivered perceptibly as she spoke. Then she stooped to reach the poker, and began nervously stirring the fire.

Mr. Thurston stopped on his way to the side-table. He came back to the fire-place and took the poker out of Eugenia's hands. Even in the instant's contact he felt their icy coldness.

"Let me do that for you," he said gently. In her nervousness Eugenia had already done the very thing she would have wished not to do. She had stirred the glowing red into a vivid blaze, which fell full on her face. Something in it must have looked

different from usual, for before she could turn away, Gerald spoke.

"Eugenia, what is the matter?" he exclaimed impulsively. "You are as cold as ice—you must be ill."

She felt his eyes fixed upon her: extreme annoyance gave her momentary strength.

"Don't, Gerald, please, don't," she said, half beseechingly, half petulantly. "There is nothing the matter. I may have got a chill, that is all. But please don't look at me. I do so dislike it."

She rose, resolved to put an end to his scrutiny. "I *will* get across the room," she thought. She made two or three steps feebly but determinedly, wondering vaguely what had come to her feet, they felt so powerless and heavy; then, it seemed to her, she stepped suddenly down, down into unfathomable depths, into darkness compared to which midnight was as noon-day. "I am dying," she thought to herself before her senses quite deserted her. "What will *he* think, how will he feel when he hears it?" And it seemed to her she called aloud

with her last breath. "Beauchamp! oh, Beauchamp!"

In reality the words were a barely audible whisper, which would certainly have been unintelligible to ears less jealously sharp than those of her one hearer.

"My darling," muttered Gerald, "so it is his doing, is it?"

The first two words made their way to Eugenia's not yet quite unconscious brain. Afterwardsshe thought she must have dreamt that Beauchamp had answered her cry.

She had never fainted before. She could not at all understand the painful coming back to life; to finding herself after all—instead of awaking in the mysterious country across the river of which we know so little, so terribly little—in the old way again, lying on the drawing-room sofa, with a keen cold current of air blowing in her face.

"Where am I?" she said, as people always do say in such circumstances, glancing round her, apprehensively. But before Gerald had time to reply, her wits had sufficiently recovered themselves to take in the position.

It had not been much of a faint after all; her young life had not required much doctoring to regain its balance for the time. Mr. Thurston had merely carried her to the window, and opened it to allow the fresh air to try what it could do. Then, laying her on the sofa, he was glad to see she was coming round again without his requiring to summon the assistance which he felt certain she would shrink from.

The room was bright with fire-light, and the cold air still blew in freshly. Eugenia lay still for a minute or two, gazing before her. Then she tried to rouse herself, and after a moment's hesitation, seeing she could hardly manage it, Gerald put his arm round her, and helped her to sit up. He need not have been afraid of annoying her. She took his help with the most perfect simplicity, as if he had been her brother.

"Thank you, Gerald," she said, softly, "you are so kind. You have always been kind to me, ever since I was quite little," and half unconsciously she allowed her still throbbing head to lean for a moment on his

shoulder. It was rather hard upon him—the perfect sisterliness of the little action made it all the more so. A sudden fear came over him that she would feel how fast his heart was beating, and would be startled into consciousness. So, very gently, under pretence of arranging the sofa cushion, he removed the arm that was round her. She did not seem to observe it.

“Are you better now, Eugenia?” he said, kindly. “I don’t know if I did right in opening the window, for I believe it must have been a chill that made you faint. But I am no doctor, and a good blow of fresh air was the only thing that occurred to me.”

“I am sure it was the best thing to do,” she answered; “I am not cold now. I don’t think it was real cold. It must have been the feeling of fainting coming on. I never fainted before, and I have always thought it *so* silly,” she added with a little smile. “I am all right now, I shall go upstairs in a minute, Gerald.” Appealingly, “You wont tell anybody?”

"Not if you promise me to tell Sydney, and see the doctor if you have any return of it, or don't feel quite well in any way."

"Very well, I will promise that," she replied, meekly enough. "It was very good of you not to call any one and make a fuss." Then, after a moment's hesitation, the hot colour rushing over her pale face, she added in a lower voice, "Gerald, didn't I say something?"

There was no use parrying her inquiry. Sorely against his will, Gerald found himself obliged to accept the position of her confidant.

"Yes," he said, simply; Eugenia did not perceive that it was sternly as well.

"Ah, I thought so," she murmured. "I know I can trust you, though sometimes one prefers to trust no one. Don't misunderstand me," she added quickly, becoming alive to the grave expression of his face; "in *one* sense, I should not care if everybody knew what you suspect. No one need be ashamed of—— I can't explain. I mean, I don't want pity. I am not to be

pitied, and *no one* is to be blamed. Only, people who only know half cannot understand, so I feel that my strength just now lies in silence."

Mr. Thurston looked at her very anxiously, the hard look melting out of his face.

"Take care you do not overrate your strength," he said gently.

Eugenia smiled, but said nothing. Then she stood up, and was about to try if she could walk, when Gerald stopped her.

"Wait one instant," he exclaimed, and before she had the least idea what he meant, he was back again with a glass of wine.

"Drink that, or at least half of it," he said. "I found it on the sideboard. It must be getting near dinner-time."

Eugenia did as he told her, and then he let her go.

"Good night; I don't think I shall come down to dinner, and thank you again very, very much, and—and please *remember*," were her last words.

Ten minutes later Sydney appeared, dressed for dinner, with a rather troubled

face. She was anxious about Eugenia, she told Gerald; it looked as if she had caught a chill somehow—she had persuaded her not to come down again, but to go straight to bed.

“But talking of chills,” she went on, hastily, “this room is enough to freeze one. What can it be? Why, actually, the window is open. My dear Gerald, what can you be made of to have sat here without finding it out?”

Mr. Dalrymple was dining with a bachelor friend that evening. It was pretty late when he got home to his wife, but he found her wide awake, and evidently in better spirits than she had been for the last day or two.

“Well, my dear Henry,” she began, “I am happy to tell you that for once your fears have been exaggerated. The Laurence girls were here to-day, and I told them—quite naturally, just in the course of conversation, you know—the piece of news I had heard. And I assure you, Eugenia took it beautifully; was not the least surprised or upset; begged me to send her congratulations, and so on. She cannot have been impressed by Beau-

champ Chancellor as you thought, for she is a girl that shows all her feelings. It is quite a relief to me. I feel quite happy about her now."

"Do you?" said Henry, with cruel satire. "I'm glad to hear it. Only I suspect your feelings are not at this moment shared by her family. Mr. Le Neve was dining at Hill's to-night, and a couple of hours ago he was sent for in a hurry to the Laurences. He said he would look in again, and so he did, and told us the patient was Miss Laurence—Eugenia, I mean. And I can tell you *he* is far from easy about her. My own idea is she's in for brain fever. Be sure you send round first thing in the morning to inquire."

Poor Mrs. Dalrymple was crushed at once.

"Don't you think Mr. Le Neve is rather an alarmist?" she ventured, timidly.

But Henry was very unfeeling. "I can't say I do," he replied, leaving his wife to her own reflections, which considerably interfered with her night's rest.



CHAPTER IV.

REACTION.

. . . The sorrows of all humanity
Through my heart make a thoroughfare.

G. MACDONALD.

THINGS, however, did not turn out quite so badly as several people anticipated. Eugenia's illness did not result in brain fever, though for a week or two it was serious enough to affect considerably the spirits of her little circle of friends, and to justify Mr. Le Neve in looking rather grave.

"Not that there is anything to be surprised at in it," he assured her father and Sydney; "there are a great many cases of the kind about just now," and he went on to murmur something about "the season," "the changeable weather," and other scapegoats of the kind always ready at hand to

bear the blame of any illness not altogether to be accounted for or easily defined.

But greatly to the relief of every one concerned, before long Eugenia began to mend, and it was then decided that what she had been suffering from had been nothing worse than "a feverish cold," and the less observant of her friends made themselves quite happy about her again. Their rejoicing, however, proved somewhat premature. When the girl came downstairs and began to go about again as usual, it became very evident, that though she had escaped an acute illness, she was far from having regained her ordinary strength. Sydney watched her anxiously, trusting at first that a few days would bring improvement, but on the contrary, at the end of a week, Eugenia seemed paler and more feeble than when she first got up. She would not own to being ill; she was only tired, she said—tired of the long winter, for spring was slow in coming that year; she would be all right when the summer came again, and Sydney must not trouble about her.

"Besides, dear," she said plaintively, "though I don't want to be selfish, you know the idea of losing you so soon is rather overwhelming to me," and the tears which seemed now-a-days nearer at hand than formerly, rushed to her eyes.

"If you are not looking better by the end of April than you do now, I shall put off my marriage," returned Sydney.

"And what would Frank say? Think how he would hate me! As it is, I believe he thinks my being ill at all is a piece of my usual perversity," said Eugenia, half playfully, half sadly. "I daresay it is true. I have always given you a great deal of trouble, Sydney, and by rights it should have been the other way. I should have looked after you."

"So you have. Neither of us could have got on without the other, and Frank knows that," replied Sydney, consolingly. "But, Eugenia, I mean what I say; so you had better be quick and get well."

She was willing enough to do so—at least to become sufficiently like herself to escape observation and be left alone. She did her

very utmost to seem well, fought valiantly to keep up a satisfactory show of good spirits, in which endeavour the unselfish fear of damping Sydney's happiness by obtruding her own sorrows materially assisted her. She was docile and submissive to all, perfectly ready to take the tonics which Mr. Le Neve prescribed for her, to try Frank Thurston's masculine panacea, "more exercise and fresh air," or her father's old-fashioned remedy of "bark and port wine." Her gentleness was almost too much for Gerald's self-control; he left off coming to see them so often, on the pretext of extra business, but found he did not gain much by so doing, for at home his brother nearly drove him wild by his calm speculations as to the possibility of Eugenia's going into a decline; "their mother was very delicate, you know, and Eugenia is more like her than Sydney," and even more irritating remarks on how much she was improved, "so much better-tempered and equable than she used to be."

One day when Sydney had been out by

herself, paying the usual bi-weekly visit to their father's old maiden aunt, their only relation in the neighbourhood, she was told by Eugenia on her return that Mrs. Dalrymple had been to see her. This was certainly no very unusual occurrence, for during the last three weeks their friend's visits had been by no means of the proverbially angelic character; but to-day, by Eugenia's account, she had come on a special errand.

"They are going away from home somewhere—they haven't quite decided where—next week," said Eugenia, "and they want me to go with them. But I told Mrs. Dalrymple that I did not think it was possible, though of course it is exceedingly kind of them. Oh, Sydney, dear," she continued, interrupting the remonstrance which she saw in her sister's face, "I *don't* want to go. Our last three weeks together, for they wouldn't be back till a few days before the 29th! And how could you get all finished by yourself without me?"

"There is very little more to do," said

Sydney, sitting down beside Eugenia and looking at her anxiously, "almost nothing in fact, except the last preparations of all, which cannot be begun till a few days beforehand, and you would be back by then. It isn't as if it was going to be a grand marriage. And to speak plainly, Eugenia—you mustn't be offended—even if there were a great deal to do, you couldn't, as you are just now, help me. Indeed you would be rather in my way. I cannot bear to see you doing anything when you look as if the least breath of air would knock you over."

Eugenia did not at once answer. She turned away her head. Then she said resignedly—

"Very well, if my father, too, wishes me to go, I will," but the pleasure which Sydney was about to express was destroyed by Eugenia's next speech. "It is as I thought. I am no use to any one. My own life is over, and I am not wanted to help in any one else's."

This was the first allusion she had made in all these weeks to the bitter sorrow she

had passed through. Sydney was touched and distressed.

"You must not speak so, Eugenia," she said. "We all want you. We want you to be your own bright self again. Don't think me unfeeling for thinking it possible you may be bright again. I know I have no right to speak, for I have been exceptionally free from trial, but you have been so brave and good lately, Eugenia. I cannot bear to see you so desponding. I am sure it will do you good to go away. It will make me feel so much happier about you."

"Very well, then, to please you, I will," said Eugenia, more vigorously, and as Mr. Laurence was only too thankful to give his consent to the proposal, Mrs. Dalrymple triumphantly carried the day.

Ever so many places had been thought of as likely to be pleasant at this season, and one after the other rejected as undesirable. One was too far away, another too crowded by invalids, a third disagreeably exposed to east wind. Their time was too short for them to entertain the idea of any of the

usual wintering places across the Channel, and Mrs. Dalrymple objected to the south of England as too distant also. So in the end they pitched upon a pretty little watering place, not more than a three hours' journey from Wareborough, where there was a good choice of walks and drives for Mr. Dalrymple, and a certainty of comfortable quarters at the best hotel.

Their destination was a matter of perfect indifference to Eugenia, whose only interest in the journey was the feeling that she was pleasing her friends, and whose only strong wish was to get it over, and find herself at home again, free to yield to the lassitude and depression against which it became daily more difficult to struggle.

"If they *would* but leave me alone," she constantly repeated inwardly; and though she hated herself for the feeling, there were times at which she realised that even Sydney's absence would be in some ways a relief. The constant and but thinly veiled anxiety in her sister's eyes, the incessant endeavour on her own part to lessen it by

appearing as bright and energetic as of old, were at times almost more than the girl could endure or sustain; and when she found herself at last fairly started on her little journey with the Dalrymples, she became conscious that she had done wisely to consent to accompany them. Mrs. Dalrymple's kindly fussiness was infinitely less trying than Sydney's wistful tenderness; it was far easier to keep up a cheerful, commonplace conversation with her friend's husband than to sit through dinner at home with the feeling that her father and sister were stealthily watching to see if she ate more to-day than yesterday, or if she entered with greater vigour into the passing remarks. With her present companions she felt perfectly at ease; had she had any idea of what an accurate acquaintance with the actual state of things had been arrived at by the worthy couple, her comfortable freedom from self-consciousness would have speedily deserted her.

Nunswell quickly got the credit of her improved looks.

“I really think she is growing more like herself already,” said Mrs. Dalrymple, with great satisfaction, to her husband. “We could not have chosen a better place for her; it is so bright and lively here, and the bracing air is so reviving.” Very probably the bracing air really had something to do with it! Eugenia was only nineteen, and this had been her first trouble. Her life hitherto had been exceptionally monotonous and uneventful; a few months ago the prospect of a visit to Nunswell would have been to her far more exciting and delightful than to most girls of her age and education would be that of a winter in Rome, or a summer in Switzerland: even now therefore, notwithstanding the blight which had fallen over her youthful capacity for enjoyment, she was not insensible to the pleasant change in her outward life from the dull routine of Wareborough; the little amusements and varieties almost daily arranged for her by her hosts; the general holiday feeling. She had not yet got the length of owning to herself that she did, or ever again could,

enjoy in her old way, but the reflection which now often passed through her mind, "how happy this would have made me a year ago," showed that she was on the high road to recovery.

Nunswell was beautifully situated, and rich in "natural objects of attraction." Eugenia had travelled so little that even the scenery of her own country was known to her only by description; it was now for the first time in her life that she woke up to a consciousness of her power of appreciation of natural beauty. Yet the waking was a sad one; her very first real perceptions of the beauty she had hitherto but dimly imagined came to her tinged with the sense of discordance between the outer and the inner world, of mistake and failure, which takes the brilliance out of the sunshine, the sweetness out of the birds' songs.

"None of it is real," thought Eugenia. "It is only where there is no soul—no heart, that there is happiness," for being still weakened in mind and body by her recent illness, having nothing to do but to

rest and amuse herself, and no one to talk to, she was inclined to be rather plaintive and desponding, and to imagine the path she was treading to be one of altogether unprecedented experiences.

Still, there was no question but what her spirits were better, her general appearance far more satisfactory than when she left home, and Mrs. Dalrymple's bulletins to Sydney became cheering in the extreme.

They had been a fortnight at Nunswell, when one morning at breakfast Mr. Dalrymple made an unexpected announcement. He had been reading his letters—business ones for the most part, forwarded from his office at Wareborough—over some of them he had frowned, others he had thrown aside after a hasty glance, one or two had brought a satisfied expression to his face. Mrs. Dalrymple and Eugenia had no letters this morning, but in deference to Mr. Dalrymple's occupation, they had been sitting in silence for some time, excepting a few whispered remarks as to the quality of the coffee or the prospects of the weather.

Eugenia was some way into a brown study when she was recalled by her host's suddenly addressing her.

"Here's some news for you, Miss Laurence," he exclaimed, looking up with a smile from the perusal of his last letter. "We are to have a visitor this afternoon—a great friend of yours. Quite time, too, that you should have a little variety—you must be getting tired of two old fogies like my wife and me."

Eugenia had started when he first began to speak—it did not take much to startle her just now—then as he went on, her colour changed, first to crimson, which fading as quickly as it had come, left her even paler than usual. Mrs. Dalrymple darted a reproachful look across the table at her husband, and began to speak hastily, in terror of what he might not be going to say next.

"Why can't you say at once who it is, Henry?" she exclaimed with very unusual irritation. "It is quite startling and uncomfortable to be told all of a sudden

‘somebody’ is coming in that sort of way. I am sure I don’t want to see any one, and I don’t think Eugenia does either. We have been very snug together, and Eugenia is not strong enough yet to care for strangers. Really, Henry, you are very thoughtless.”

The last few words should have been an aside, but Mrs. Dalrymple’s vexation at the sight of the pallid hue still overspreading the girl’s face, overmastered her prudence.

“It didn’t startle me, dear Mrs. Dalrymple—really it didn’t,” interposed Eugenia, hastily. “That is to say, I was only startled for an instant, and it was not Mr. Dalrymple’s fault. Anything does it—even the door opening—since I was ill, but I am beginning to get over it. But you are quite right in thinking I don’t want any one else—I have been *quite* happy with you and Mr. Dalrymple.”

“But you have misunderstood me, Mary,” said Mr. Dalrymple, looking rather contrite. “I never spoke of strangers. I said particularly it was a friend of Miss Laurence’s

I was expecting. It is Gerald Thurston. I have a note from him proposing to see me here this afternoon, and if we are not engaged, he speaks of staying at Nunswell till Monday. He is on his way home from Bristol, where he has been on business, and he wishes to see me, and I want to see him. I am sure you can have no objection to his joining us for two days, either of you?" he ended by inquiring of his two companions.

"Objection to Gerald Thurston!" repeated Mrs. Dalrymple. "Of course not. I shall be very glad to see him. I only wish you had said at first whom you meant. You don't mind, Eugenia?"

"I?" said Eugenia, looking up quickly. "Oh, dear no—I am very glad. I like Gerald Thurston very much. He is very kind and good."

"And exceedingly clever, and uncommonly good-looking," added Mr. Dalrymple, warmly. "Take him for all in all, I don't know where there is a finer fellow than Thurston."

"So my father says," agreed Eugenia.

“Indeed I think every one that knows him thinks highly of him.”

She was anxious to be cordial, and really felt so towards Gerald. Of late she had come to like him much more than formerly, and the extreme consideration and delicacy which he had shown the evening her illness began, had increased this liking by a feeling of gratitude. Nevertheless there had grown up unconsciously in her a somewhat painful association with Gerald since that evening, and she had not seen enough of him to remove it. “He knows,” she said to herself, and she shrank from meeting him again.

But it was much pleasanter and easier than she had expected. Gerald, intensely alive to all she was feeling, behaved perfectly, and spared her in a thousand ways without appearing, even to her, to do so at all. The two days proved the pleasantest they had passed at Nunswell: Mr. Thurston knew the neighbourhood well, and drove them to some charming nooks and points of view, somewhat out of the beaten guide-book

track, which they had not hitherto discovered. Mrs. Dalrymple openly expressed her gratification and surprise.

“I always knew Gerald Thurston was very clever and superior and all that sort of thing, you know,” she said to Eugenia, “but I had no idea he could make himself so agreeable.”

Eugenia herself was a little surprised. The truth was she had never before, since his return from India, seen Gerald to advantage: in her presence hitherto he had been always self-conscious and constrained, stern and moody, if not morose. Now it was different. A feeling of extreme pity, of almost brotherly anxiety for her happiness, had replaced the intenser feelings with which he had regarded her; he had no longer any fears for himself or his own self-control in her presence—that was all over, past for ever like a dream in the night; he could venture now to be at ease, could devote himself unselfishly to cheer and interest her in any way that came into his power. And under this genial influence the bruised petals

of the flower, not crushed so utterly as had seemed at first, began to revive and expand again, to feel conscious of the bright sunshine and gentle breezes still around it, though for a time all light and life had seemed to it to have deserted its world.

“I had no idea Gerald was so wonderfully understanding and sympathizing,” thought Eugenia. “If I have a feeling or a question it is difficult to put in words, he seems to know what I mean by instinct;” and encouraged by this discovery, she allowed herself to talk to him, once or twice when they were alone together, of several things which had lately been floating in her mind.

Trouble and disappointment were doing their work with her; she was beginning to look for a meaning in many things that hitherto she had disregarded or accepted with youthful carelessness as matters-of-course with which she had no call to meddle. But now it was different: she had eaten of the fruit of the tree; she had ventured her all in a frail bark, and it had foundered; it had come home to her that

life and love are often sad, and sometimes terrible facts, and her heart was beginning to swell with a great pity for her suffering-kind. It was all vague and misty to her as yet; it might result in nothing, as is too often the end of such crises in a growing character, but still the germ was there.

"Gerald," she said to Mr. Thurston, suddenly, after she had been sitting silent for some minutes. (They were in the gardens of the hotel at the time. It was Sunday afternoon and a mild April day; Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple had gone to church again, but Eugenia and Mr. Thurston had been tempted by the pleasant weather to play truant.) "Gerald," said Eugenia, "I wish there was something that women could do."

Mr. Thurston turned towards her. She now looking straight before her with a puzzled yet earnest expression on her face.

"Something that women can do?" he repeated, not quite sure of her drift. "I

thought there were lots of things. Most women complain of 'want of time.'

"So do I sometimes. I am never at a loss for occupation—that's not what I mean," she replied. "What I mean is, I wish there were bigger things—more useful things for women to do."

"You have not been infected with the Women's Rights mania, surely?" inquired Gerald, rather unresponsively.

"Of course not. Don't laugh at me, Gerald. You can understand me if you choose. I should like to feel I was of some use to somebody, and lately I have felt as if no one in the world would be the least bit the worse if I were out of it." Here she blushed a little. "Now don't you see if I were a man I could set to work hard at something—something that would be of use in some way. Put it to yourself, Gerald; suppose—suppose you had given up thoughts of—of being very happy yourself" (here the blush deepened to hot crimson), "wouldn't you naturally—after a while, you know—wouldn't you set to work harder than ever

at whatever you felt was your own special business—the thing you felt you were most likely to be of use in? Now a woman has no such field open to her.”

Internally Gerald had winced a little, two or three times, while Eugenia was speaking. Externally, he sat there looking colder and more impassive than usual. He had loved this girl, had set her up on the pedestal of ideal womanhood that somewhere or other exists in the imagination of every man not wholly faithless or depraved; she had fallen, it is true, in a sense, from this height, she had proved herself in his judgment to be but as the rest of her sex—childishly credulous, ready to mistake the glitter for the gold, honeyed words for heart devotion—yet still he cared for her, was tenderly anxious for her welfare. But of all things Gerald hated sentimentalism!

“There are plenty of Protestant sisterhoods,” he said, drily. “How would one of those suit you?”

Eugenia made no reply. After waiting a moment or two, Mr. Thurston turned

towards her again. To his surprise he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Eugenia," he exclaimed, softened at once, "have I hurt you? I did not intend it. I assure you I did not, in the least."

"No, I know you didn't," she said, struggling to smile and to speak cheerfully. "I am very silly. I can't help it. I have got so silly and touchy lately, the least thing seems to vex me. But you did hurt me a little, Gerald. I was in earnest in what I said, though you thought it missyish and contemptible. I have been trying to see how I could grow better and less selfish, and you don't know how hard it is, for no one seems to understand. And, oh you don't know, you who are so strong and wise, you *don't* know how hard it is to be good when one is very unhappy."

"Don't I?" muttered he, but she did not catch the words.

"If I could be of use," she went on again, after a little pause. "And why can't I be? There must be plenty of misery in the world. Why can't I make some of it a little less?"

"You can," he answered, gently. "I don't think I quite understood you. I thought you were envying men's work and despising your own sphere—a very common and often excusable mistake. I see now there was a more unselfish spirit in what you meant."

"I don't know that," she answered, doubtfully, but brightening up nevertheless. "I do think I should like to make some people happier, or a little less unhappy, and in some ways perhaps better too. For surely very often being happier would make people better, would it not? But I am selfish too—I want to get something to take me out of myself—something that I can get interested in by feeling it is of use."

"Don't you help your father sometimes?" inquired Gerald. "Haven't you a good deal to do in looking after things at home?"

"No—very little indeed. The house has got into a jog-trot way of going on, and papa won't have changes. What little there has been to do hitherto, I am afraid Sydney

has done," said Eugenia, blushing a little. "Of course I don't intend to neglect that sort of thing, but there is very little to do. I do help my father whenever he will let me, by copying out things and hunting up references and quotations. But it isn't often he wants help."

"And would he not let you help him more if you asked him?"

"He might, but it would only be to please me," replied Eugenia, despondingly. "No, I am afraid it is true—I am no use to anybody. Once, I remember, ever, ever so long ago," she went on, as if ten or twenty years at least were within easy grasp of her memory, "I had visions of becoming frightfully learned, of studying all my life long, and getting to the bottom of everything. What a little goose I was! Just because I had learnt Latin and German and a few other things more thoroughly than most girls! I wonder sometimes if, after all, all the trouble papa took with us has been much good to us. Look at Sydney; what will be the use of it to her, marrying at eighteen? And as

for me, if I were really clever I suppose I should go on working away, absorbed in the work without thinking of any result. But I can't, Gerald. It doesn't satisfy me. I want to see and feel a result."

She looked up in his face, her bright, earnest eyes full of inquiry. "Can't you help me?" they seemed to say.

Could he? A tantalizing vision rose before him of how at one time he had looked forward to doing so—how well he understood her, and the special phase through which she was passing! Was it too late? Was there yet a chance that by much patience and by slow degrees he might win to himself this girl whom no one understood as he understood her, whose very faults and imperfections were dear to him? The thought seemed to dazzle and bewilder him, but a glance at Eugenia made him dismiss it. She sat there beside him, in such utter unconsciousness, such sisterly reliance on his friendship, that he felt it would be cruel to her and in every sense worse than useless to disturb the existing state of things. The

far off, dimly possible future must take care of itself; and after all—she could never be quite the same Eugenia to him again.

So he answered her very quietly and soberly, as she expected.

“You cannot judge of things quite justly at present, I think,” he said, after a little pause. “I have had the same sort of feelings myself sometimes, though, of course, my life has been too busy to tempt me to yield to them much. But they will pass away again, you will find. You will come to feel that nothing well done is ever useless. And, in the meantime, there is no fear but what things will turn up for you to do. I could put you in the way of some,” he continued, with a smile, “though I don’t know if they would be quite to your taste. Frank sometimes takes me to task a little for some of my ideas, so we should have to be careful.”

“I am quite sure *I* should agree with you,” said Eugenia, eagerly. “I know you do an immense deal of good, Gerald. Papa

says so, and I have often wanted to ask you about it, but I didn't like."

"There is exceedingly little to tell," he replied, simply. "I am no theorist, and I limit my attempts to what I think I see a chance of doing."

Then, perceiving that her interest was really aroused, he told her something of what he was trying to do, and promised some time or other to tell her more.

Eugenia felt happier than she had done for long, that evening. Her respect for Gerald Thurston was rapidly increasing.

"I have never before done him justice," she said to herself; "I am most fortunate to have him for a friend."

Gerald, on his way back to Wareborough, felt very glad that he had seen her again.

"It was the best thing to do to get over the uncomfortable feeling," thought he. "She trusts me now thoroughly, and I may be of use to her."

And Sydney, who had been a little puzzled by Gerald's visit to Nunswell, was greatly

delighted by his cheerful looks and satisfactory report of her sister.

“After all,” she thought, hopefully, “it may all come right in the end. Who knows?”





CHAPTER V.

AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT.

La femme qui ne cesse pas d'aimer celui qui l'a fait souffrir, parvient à l'aimer encore davantage.

Let time and chance combine, combine.

T. CARLYLE'S *Adieu*.



WHO knows, indeed! Gerald left Nunswell on Monday morning, and for the rest of that day Eugenia's thoughts were principally occupied in reflecting over all he had said, and wishing he had stayed longer and said more. She got up on Tuesday morning in the same spirit, and resolving to strike before the iron of her new determination to struggle against despondency and depression had had time to cool, she went out into the gardens armed with one of the few books she had brought with her, Schlegel's "*Philosophie der Sprache*," which she had been studying under her father's direction just before her illness.

"I will force myself to read a certain quantity every day," she decided, as she ensconced herself on the same garden-seat on which she and Gerald had sat on Sunday afternoon. All around her reminded her of their conversation, of his few words of encouragement and advice.

"Trying must always be some good, whether one sees it or not, I suppose," thought Eugenia, and with this somewhat vague but certainly innocuous piece of philosophy she set to work at her self-appointed task.

She found it harder than she had anticipated; considerably more so than it used to be; she did not make allowance for the effects of her illness, and entirely attributed the difficulty she met with to "stupidity" and "forgetfulness," and thereupon ensued a fit of self-disgust.

"I to think myself clever, indeed!" she thought, "or able to be ever of use to any one. The first thing I have to do, it seems to me, is to get rid of my self-conceit. Why, I have forgotten more

German in a month than I learnt in five years."

She was not, however, to be easily baffled. She read and re-read each intricate sentence till its meaning became clear; till, too, her head ached and her eyes grew weary, and she was at last obliged to stop and rest before she had got half through the allotted portion. Her retreat was in a retired part of the gardens; hitherto she had been undisturbed by passers-by; suddenly, as she sat leaning back, her eyes closed, her whole appearance that of extreme weariness and languor, two gentlemen passed within a few yards of her. They were not speaking as they approached, but she heard their footsteps and opened her eyes for a moment, to close them again quickly when she saw that the two figures were disappearing in another direction.

"What an exquisitely pretty girl," observed one of the two when they were out of earshot, "but how fearfully delicate she looks. I don't think I ever saw such a transparent complexion. Did you notice

her? She seemed to be asleep, and yet she looks as if she were some way gone in a decline. How extraordinary of her friends to let her fall asleep in the open air in April. How frightfully imprudent."

"I didn't notice her," replied his companion, carelessly. "It's not likely she is in a consumption, however. Consumptive people don't come to Nunswell; it's too cold. But if your feelings are interested, Thanet, I am quite willing to wait while you turn back and waken her. And you had better give her a little lecture on the subject of her imprudence at the same time, hadn't you?"

"Nonsense, Chancellor," replied Major Thanet, rather irritably. "If you had been on your back for three months, and suffering as I have been, you would understand what it is to have some feeling for your fellow-creatures. A year ago I should have laughed at such notions as you do now, I daresay," he continued, more amiably, "but don't make fun of me till you have had a touch of rheumatic fever yourself."

"I have no wish to try it, thank you," said Captain Chancellor, lightly. "I am quite willing to take your word for it that it is the reverse of agreeable. But a minute ago you would have it the young person must be half way gone in a decline, and now you say she's in for rheumatic fever. We had better have a look at her, really: you said she was awfully pretty, didn't you?"

Major Thanet grunted a but half mollified assent. He was still too lame to walk without the help of his friend's arm, so when Captain Chancellor turned to retrace their steps, he made no objection, though feeling still annoyed by what he considered his companion's ill-timed "chaff."

The girl was not asleep this time. She was reading, and did not look up till they had passed. Her attitude was still the same; she was half sitting, half lying on the bench, her head resting wearily on one hand, while the other held her book. Major Thanet looked at her, as they walked slowly past, with considerable interest.

"She is a lovely creature, whoever she

is," he remarked to his companion when they had walked on a little further. "Don't you think so? She looks delicate, but hardly so much so as I fancied at first. It must have been the effect of her closed eyes."

Captain Chancellor did not answer. Major Thanet was a much shorter man than his friend, and he stooped slightly in consequence of his illness. So he had not seen his companion's face since they had passed the invalid girl. Now, however, he looked up, surprised at his silence, and a little irritated by his remark eliciting no reply.

"What are you thinking of, Chancellor?" he exclaimed. "Didn't you see the girl? Don't you——?"

But his sentence was never completed, so much was he startled by what he saw in his friend's face.

Captain Chancellor was deadly pale, paler by far than the girl whose pallor had attracted Major Thanet's attention. An expression of extreme disquiet had replaced

his ordinary air of comfortable well-bred nonchalance, and his voice sounded hoarse and abrupt when at last he spoke.

"There is a sheltered seat on there, I see, Thanet," he said, pointing to a sort of arbour a little in front. "Do you mind my leaving you for a few minutes? I shall not be long, but—but—I *must* run back for a moment."

"Certainly, certainly, by all means," replied Major Thanet, good-naturedly, though feeling not a little curious. "One of the irresistible Beauchamp's little 'affaires,' cropping up rather inconveniently, I fear, if what they say of his engagement to that very dark-eyed Miss Eyrecourt be true," he said to himself; adding aloud, when Captain Chancellor had taken him at his word, and deposited him in the summer-house, "Don't hurry, my dear fellow, on my account. If the worst comes to the worst, I expect I can toddle back to the hotel with my stick."

"Thank you. I shall not be long," repeated Beauchamp, hardly knowing what

Major Thanet had said, and setting off, as he spoke, at a rapid pace, in the direction of Eugenia's seat.

But as he drew nearer to her, his steps slackened. After all, what had he to say to her? Was it not even possible he had been mistaken in her identity? And supposing it were she—that this fragile shadow were the blooming girl he had left, not without some misgiving and regret, only a few weeks ago—why should he suppose he was to blame for the change? She had never looked very strong; she might have had any ordinary illness, that had nothing to say to him or her possible feelings towards him. Girls, now-a-days, didn't die of broken hearts; that sort of thing was all very well in novels and ballads, but was seldom come across in real life, and more than half inclined to turn back again to his friend with some excuse for his eccentric behaviour, Captain Chancellor stopped short. But before he had time to decide what he should do, a faint, low cry, that seemed somehow to shape itself into the

sound of his own name, arrested him. He was nearer the garden-bench than he had imagined: in his hurry and confusion he had approached it by another path; a step or two in advance and Eugenia stood before him. She had recognised him after he had passed with Major Thanet the second time, had sat there in an indescribable conflict of emotions—of fear and self-distrust; of vague, unreasonable anticipation; of foolish, irrepressible delight in the knowledge of his near presence; of bitter, humiliating consciousness that such feelings were no longer lawful—that he was now the betrothed, possibly even the husband, of another woman.

“Why did I see him? What unhappy fate has brought him here—to revive it all—to begin again all my struggles—just when I was growing a little happier and more at peace?” she had been crying in her heart. And then her ears had caught the quickly-approaching footsteps—the firm, sharp tread which she told herself she could have known among a thousand, and she

forgot everything; forgot all about Roma Eyrecourt and his sudden departure, her own misery, his apparent indifference; remembered only that at last—at last—she saw him again, stood within a few feet of the man she had been doing her utmost to banish for ever from her heart and thoughts. One glance, all the labour was in vain—all the painful task to begin over again at the very beginning!

He was the first to break silence. It would have been a farce to have done so with any ordinary conventional form of greeting; her agitation, as she stood there, pale as death, trembling from head to foot, grasping convulsively at the rough wood-work of the bench for support—her poor “Philosophie” lying on the ground at her feet—was too palpable to be ignored; to have attempted to do so would have been to insult her. And Beauchamp Chancellor was not the man to stab deliberately and in cold blood, however indifferent he might be to suffering which fell not within his sight. And just now, in full view of Eugenia’s

altered features and pitiful agitation, all the latent manliness of his nature was aroused ; for the time he almost forgot himself in the sudden rush of tenderness for the girl who, he could no longer doubt, had suffered sorely for his sake ; whose guileless devotion contrasted not unpleasantly with the still fresh remembrance of Roma Eyrecourt's scornful indifference. So it was in a tone of extreme and unconcealed anxiety that he spoke.

"You have been ill, Miss Laurence," he exclaimed ; "I can see that you have been dreadfully ill. Good heavens, and I not to know it ! And I have startled you by coming upon you so unexpectedly. What can I do or say to make you forgive me."

Eugenia was recovering herself a little by now ; some consciousness of what was due to her own self-respect was returning to her ; she made a hard fight to regain her self-possession.

"There is nothing to forgive," she answered, trying to smile, though her quivering lips and tremulous voice were by no means under her control. "I have been

ill, but not 'dreadfully.' When one is usually strong, I suppose even a slight illness shakes one's nerves. I am still absurdly easily startled."

The last few words came very faintly. The same bewildering sensation of giddiness that she had felt once before in her life came over Eugenia; a horror seized her that in another moment she would again lose consciousness altogether—what might she not say, how might she not betray herself in such a case, to him—to this man who belonged to Roma Eyrecourt, not to her? She was standing by the end of the bench; she turned, and tried to reach the seat, but she could not see clearly, every object seemed to dance before her eyes, she would have fallen had not Beauchamp darted forward, caught her in his arms, and almost lifted her on to the bench. His touch seemed to inspire her with curious strength, the giddiness passed away; she sat up, and shrinking back from his supporting arm with an unmistakable air of repugnance, whispered—for she had not yet voice to speak—

"Thank you, but *please* go away, Captain Chancellor. I am quite well again now."

Considerably mortified, Beauchamp sprang back. He was at all times easily nettled and prone to take offence, and in the present case the unexpectedness of the repulse made it additionally hurting. He stood still for a minute or two, watching Eugenia, as she sat in evident discomfort and constraint under his scrutiny. Then he spoke again—

"I would have left you at once, Miss Laurence," he said, stiffly, "if you were fit to be left, but you really are not. If you will tell me, however, where I can find your friends I will go in search of them, and not trouble you any more with my unwelcome presence."

She looked up wistfully into his face.

"I have offended you," she said. "Oh, what shall I do? I don't know what to do. Oh, why did you come here? You make it so difficult—so dreadfully difficult. I don't blame you—I know you could not help it: but I have been trying so hard to forget you, and you wont let me. You have no

right to put yourself in my way ; it is cruel and unmanly of you," she went on, with a quick fierceness in her tone ; " you know how weak and ignorant I am. Why can't you leave me ? But, oh, what have I been saying ?" And with a sudden awakening to the inference of her words, an overwhelming rush of shame, bewilderment, and misery, she hid her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

This was altogether too much for Captain Chancellor. He flung himself on the seat beside her, clasped her in his arms, lavishing upon her every term of lover-like endearment.

" Eugenia, my dearest, my own darling !" he exclaimed, " I cannot bear to see you so. Why should I keep away from you ? Fate is too strong for prudence. We cannot be separated, you see. I will break every tie, I will crush every obstacle that can come between us. Look up, my dearest, and tell me you will be happy, and will trust yourself to me."

She did not repulse him now ; she was

too exhausted and worn out to struggle. She hardly realised the meaning of his words, but for this short minute she allowed herself to rest in his arms, with a vague feeling that it was only for this once—he must go away, he must marry Roma ; it must be, he could not break his word ; and she, Eugenia, would never see him again ; she would not live long now, she had no strength to struggle back to common life again, as she had nearly succeeded in doing ; it would be better for her to die quietly, and then it would not surely matter to any one that she had for this once smothered her maidenly dignity, had allowed the promised husband of another to hold her in his arms, to call her his dearest, to kiss her pale cheeks, and swear he would never give her up.

Suddenly an approaching footstep startled them. Only a very few minutes had passed since Beauchamp had first returned to her, but to Eugenia it seemed hours. Captain Chancellor got up from the seat and stood quietly beside her, as if engaged in ordinary conversation. The new comer was only a

stranger who passed by without noticing them, but the interruption recalled Beauchamp's thoughts to outside matters.

"I think perhaps I had better go," he said, reluctantly, "but I cannot leave you to find your way back alone. My friend, Major Thanet, is waiting for me a little further on. He is lame, and cannot walk home alone. Would you mind remaining here a very few minutes till I have seen him safe back to his room, and then I can return here for you?"

The anxious tenderness of his words and manner was very sweet to Eugenia, but she resisted the temptation. She had had her moment of weakness, but that was now past and gone. Still, this was not the time or place for saying what had to be said, nor had she now strength for any discussion. So she merely answered gently, so gently that any possibility of offence was out of the question—

"Please not. I mean, please don't come back for me. It is better not. I am quite able to go home alone now; but if you

would rather" (in deference to a shake of his head), "you might leave a message at the hotel, asking Mrs. Dalrymple's maid to come for me. She will not be surprised; she often goes out with me, and she knows this seat."

"I will do so," he replied. "So you are with the Dalrymples!"—and Eugenia detected, and was not surprised at, a slight shade of annoyance in his tone.

"Yes," she replied, simply.

"But—but that will not matter?" he inquired, hesitatingly. "You are your own mistress. You will see me? I shall try to see you in an hour or two again. There will be no difficulty about it?"

He had turned to leave her, but waited an instant for her answer.

"Oh, no, there will be no difficulty. I will see you, or write to you," she said, a little confusedly.

Her last words struck him rather oddly, but he attributed them to her nervousness and embarrassment; and, fearful of increasing these, he left her, as she desired.

And for the next quarter of an hour, till the maid came for her, Eugenia never took her eyes from the path down which Beauchamp had disappeared. "I shall never see him again," she said to herself; "never, never. I must not. He must not break his word for me. Oh, I hope—I do hope I shall not live much longer."

When she got back to the hotel, Eugenia found the Dalrymples both out. Mr. Dalrymple she knew was off for the day on some expedition; but his wife, she found on inquiry, had left word for her that she would be in in half an hour. So Eugenia went up to her own room, and sitting down, tried to decide what was best to do. She only saw two things clearly,—she must not risk seeing Beauchamp again, and she must confide in Mrs. Dalrymple.

"There is no help for it," she said to herself. "Even if I told her nothing, she is sure to meet him, and she could not but suspect something. It would never do to let her find it out for herself. Why, Roma Eyrecourt is her cousin! No, I *must* trust her;

and I must get her to let me go home at once. I cannot stay here,—I cannot.”

Mrs. Dalrymple, returning from her walk, was met by a request that she would at once go to Miss Laurence’s room. She felt a little startled.

“What is the matter? Miss Laurence is not ill, surely?” she said to her maid, who was watching for her with Eugenia’s message.

The young woman, a comparative stranger, answered that she did not know; she had not thought Miss Laurence looking very well when she came in, but she had not complained. Eugenia’s face, however, confirmed her friend’s fears.

“You are ill, my dear child,” she exclaimed at once. “Have you got cold again, do you think? You were looking so well this morning.”

“I am not ill,—truly I am not,” replied Eugenia. “But, dear Mrs. Dalrymple, I wanted to see you as soon as you came in, to ask you to be so very, very kind as to let me go home at once,—to-day if possible.”

“Go home to-day! My dear Eugenia, it is out of the question. You must be ill,” said Mrs. Dalrymple, considerably perplexed, and half-inclined to think the girl’s brain was affected.

“No, no; it isn’t that. Oh, Mrs. Dalrymple, I can’t bear to tell you! I have never spoken of it to any one,—only to one person at least,” she said, correcting herself, as the remembrance of her conversations with Gerald returned to her mind. “But I am sure I can trust you, and you will understand. It is—it is because Captain Chancellor is here that I want to go.”

“My poor child!” said Mrs. Dalrymple, very tenderly, drawing Eugenia nearer her as she spoke; and though she said no more, the girl saw how mistaken she had been in imagining that no one had guessed her secret, and a painful flush of shame rose to her brow at the thought.

Then, after a moment’s pause, her friend spoke again.

“You are sure of it?” she inquired.
“You are sure that he is here,—actually

here? May you not have made some mistake?"

"Oh, no; I am sure, quite sure," repeated Eugenia, earnestly. "He is certainly here, staying at Nunswell. For all I know, in this very house."

Mrs. Dalrymple sat silent again for a little, apparently thinking it over.

"I don't quite understand it," she said at length; "what he is doing here just now, I mean. I thought he was at Winsley. But all the same,—though of course it is most unfortunate, most peculiarly unfortunate,—the very thing of all others I should most have wished to avoid for you,—all the same, my dear child, I confess I hardly see that it would be right or wise for us to allow it to interfere with our plans. Of course, if you go home, we shall go too. That does not matter; it would make very little difference to us. But don't you think, Eugenia, it would be just a little undignified,—not to say cowardly,—to seem afraid of him,—to run away whenever he appears? I should like him

rather to see, or to think, that he is no more to you than he deserves to be. Don't be offended with me. I have felt for you and with you more than I can express all through."

She waited rather anxiously for Eugenia's answer. It was slow of coming. Mrs. Dalrymple began to fear she had gone too far; she could not understand the look of embarrassment on Eugenia's face.

"Yes," she said, at last; "you are quite right. It would have been cowardly to have run away had it been as you think, though I dare say I should have wished to do so all the same. I *am* a coward, I suppose; at least, I entirely distrust my own strength. And I have reason enough to do so," she added, in a lower tone, hardly intended for her companion's ears. "But it isn't quite as you think. It is not only on my own account I want to go away. It is not only that I have *seen* him—Captain Chancellor, I mean. I have spoken to him. He saw me this morning in the gardens, and came back to speak to me; and—and—

if I stay here he will insist on seeing me, and it may be very painful for us all."

"I *don't* understand," exclaimed Mrs. Dalrymple. "What can he want to see you for? What can he have to say to you,—he, engaged to Roma Eyrecourt?"

"I can't tell you. I am so afraid of making you angry, for of course she is your cousin," said Eugenia, in great distress. "But still I thought it best to be quite open with you. He forgot himself,—for the time only, I dare say," she continued, with an irrepressible sigh and a sudden sense of bitter humility. "He saw that I had been ill, and I think he was dreadfully sorry for me, and I was alone, and somehow I suppose I was frightfully undignified, and unmaidenly even,"—the harsh word, though self-inflicted, bringing a painful blush with it. "I dare say it was all my fault, but any way he offered to give up everything for my sake, to break all ties and obstacles."

"And you accepted such a proposal?" exclaimed Mrs. Dalrymple, indignantly, for, after all, "blood is thicker than water," and

the imagined insult to her kinswoman, of such treatment, struck home.

"No, oh, no; of course not," replied Eugenia, eagerly. "That is what makes me want to go. I had not time—we were interrupted—I could not make him understand that such a thing was impossible,—impossible in every sense,—for him,—for me. Could I, do you think, marry any man who, for my sake, had broken his word to another woman,—had perhaps broken *another* woman's heart? Oh, no, no. You do not think I could? I would rather die!"

"And do you think he really meant it?" questioned Mrs. Dalrymple. "Certainly I have not seen much of him of late years, but I used to know him well, and I must say it is not the *sort* of thing I should have imagined him doing. He must be either a better or a worse man than I have supposed—possibly both."

Eugenia did not reply to the last observation: perhaps she did not hear it. But she answered Mrs. Dalrymple's question.

"I do think he meant it. And I think he will continue to mean it unless it is at once discouraged," she said; "at once, before he has time to do anything rash with regard to Miss Eyrecourt. It will not be enough for me to refuse to see him—I must go away. While I stay here, any unlucky chance might bring us together again, like this morning. And I cannot trust myself, now that he knows—for he *does* know," she turned her face away, "that—that I do care for him, that I would make any sacrifice for him except doing wrong, or letting him do wrong. Though, indeed, I must not boast: no one knows how hard it is not to do wrong, till one is tried."

"My poor child," said Mrs. Dalrymple, quite as tenderly now as at the beginning of the conversation. And then she added, "I wonder what we should do. I wish Henry were back."

"When do you think he will be back?" asked Eugenia, influenced not so much by her friend's wifely belief in Mr. Dalrymple's

diplomatic powers as by her own anxiety to obtain his approval of her at once leaving Nunswell.

"I don't know. Not before evening," replied her friend.

"And something must be done—should be done before post-time," said Eugenia. "He said he would call to see me; would it do for me to write a note to be given him when he comes? It will be so difficult to say it. Oh dear, oh dear!"

She got up from her seat, and walked to the window and back again, her hands clasped, in restless misery. There came a knock at the door.

"A gentleman to see Miss Laurence, if you please, ma'am," said Mrs. Dalrymple's Bertha, importantly. "This is his card. He asked for the young lady staying with you, ma'am."

Mrs. Dalrymple took the card mechanically, and glanced at the name as if there were still any possibility of mistake.

"Captain Chancellor," the two words stared her in the face, and down in the

corner in little letters—"203rd (East Woldshire) Regiment."

It all looked so straightforward and above-board: there was no apparent consciousness of conduct or intentions "unbecoming an officer and a gentleman." And yet the girl he was calmly proposing to treat with ignominy and indignity was her own cousin; the girl for whose sake he proposed so to dishonour himself actually a guest in her own charge! Mrs. Dalrymple felt more and more perplexed. How could the young man have the audacity to send up his card in this brazen-faced way? Surely there must be some strange mistake. A sudden thought struck her. She turned to Eugenia, standing pale, and with great, wistful eyes, beside her.

"He does mean it, you see," whispered the girl.

"Yes, I see," replied the matron. Then turning to the servant: "Bertha, say to Captain Chancellor we shall see him immediately," and when Bertha had departed on her errand, "Eugenia, my love," she said

gently, "I think it will be best for *me* to see him."

"Very well. Thank you very much," replied Eugenia, yet with a wild, unreasonable regret that she had been so taken at her word, that fate had not *forced* her into seeing him again, into the very danger her better nature so dreaded and shrank from.





CHAPTER VI.

SUNSHINE.

. . . All hearts in love use their own tongues :
Let every eye negotiate for itself,
And trust no agent.—*Much Ado about Nothing.*



CAPTAIN CHANCELLOR was standing by the window when Mrs. Dalrymple entered the room. As the sound of the door opening caught his ear, he turned sharply round with a look of eager expectancy on his fair, handsome face, which did not escape the notice of Eugenia's self-constituted guardian, and notwithstanding his habitual good breeding and self-possession, he did not altogether succeed in concealing the disappointment which was caused him by the sight of his old friend's substantial proportions in the place of the girlish figure he had been watching for. He was eager to see Eugenia again. Unimpulsive

though he was by nature, little as he had dreamt but three short hours before of ever again seeing her, of holding her in his arms and calling her his own, he was now almost passionately anxious for her presence. Away from her, he had found it difficult to realise, to justify to himself, this rash, unpremeditated deed he had done—a deed at variance with all his preconceived ideas, all the intentions of his life. But beside her, in the light of her sweet eyes, in the sense of her loveliness, of her delicate grace—above all, of her clinging trust in and entire devotion to himself, he felt that all his scruples and misgivings would vanish into air. He would feel satisfied then of what he tried to believe he felt satisfied of now, that being what he was, a man and not a statue, a “gentleman” who (in his own sense) held honour high, and would scorn to take advantage of a woman’s weakness, he could not have acted otherwise. Fortified thus, he could brave all,—his friends’ probable “chaff” on his weakness, “to think of Chancellor’s throwing himself away after all for a pair of bright

eyes ;" his sister's certain disapproval, Roma's possible contempt. These, and more practical disagreeables, in the shape of poverty, comparatively speaking, at least ; the loss of the personal luxuries which even with his limited means had, as a bachelor, been within his easy reach ; the general, indescribable descent from the position of a much-made-of young officer without encumbrances, to that of a struggling captain in a line regiment with a delicate wife and too probable family—all these appalling visions already fully recognised, Beauchamp had forthwith set to work to make up his mind to. But he was thirsting for his reward. He was in a very good humour with himself. For the first time in his life he had acted purely on an impulse, and this impulse he imagined to be a much nobler one than it really was. He did not exactly call his conduct by fine names to himself, but in his heart he longed to hear Eugenia do so. He loved her tenderly, he said now to himself that he certainly did so, yet not hitherto so vehemently that he could not have put his love on one side in

acknowledgment of weightier considerations. He had been shocked by the change in her appearance, and to some extent took blame to himself in the matter, yet, even while doing so, a slight, a very slight tinge of contempt for her weakness and transparency, mingled itself with his concern and self-reproach. She was not certainly of the stuff of a "Clara Vere de Vere;" there was an amount of undisciplined, unsophisticated effusiveness about her, hardly in accordance with his notion of "thorough-breeding," yet such as she was she was infinitely sweet; he was only longing to have her beside him to tell her so, to clasp her in his arms again, and kiss the colour into her soft white cheeks.

So it was really very disappointing, instead of Eugenia, to be brought face to face with Mary Dalrymple. He made the best of it, however—in a general way he was very clever at doing so. He came forward with his usual gently pleasant smile, his hand outstretched in greeting, murmuring something about being so pleased, so very pleased

to see Mrs. Dalrymple again. She hardly appeared to take in the sense of his words.

"How do you do, Captain Chancellor?" she said as she shook hands. Afterwards he fancied there had been a very slight hesitation in her manner before doing so, but at the time his complete unsuspectingness prevented his imagining the possibility of such a thing. "It is quite an unexpected pleasure to meet you here."

"Yes," he answered cautiously, uncertain to what extent Eugenia might have taken Mary into her confidence, and feeling his way before committing himself; "yes, I thought my turning up would be a surprise to you."

"I thought you were still at Winsley," said Mrs. Dalrymple, also feeling her way.

"Oh dear no," he replied. "Winsley is all very well for a fortnight, but six weeks of it would be rather too much of a good thing. I left Winsley some time ago. I am here now with an old friend of mine, Major Thanet, who has been very ill with

rheumatic fever, and came down here to recruit."

"And are you returning to Winsley again soon?" inquired Mrs. Dalrymple, her suspicion increasing that they were playing at cross purposes in some direction.

"Oh dear no," he said again. "My leave is about up—I got a little more than my six weeks on Thanet's account. I am due at Bridgenorth next week."

"At Bridgenorth," repeated Mrs. Dalrymple. "Oh, indeed; and do you remain here till then?"

"Upon my word I can't say," replied Captain Chancellor, with an approach to impatience in his tone. "I certainly didn't come here to sit being catechized by Mary Pevensey all the afternoon," he said to himself, waxing wroth at Mrs. Dalrymple's cross questions and Eugenia's non-appearance. Then suddenly throwing caution to the winds, "To tell you the truth," exclaimed he, "my plans at present depend greatly upon yours."

"Upon ours—may I ask why?" inquired

Eugenia's chaperone quietly, and without testifying the surprise her visitor expected.

"Because upon yours depend those of your visitor—at least so I suppose," answered Beauchamp, coolly. "Miss Laurence is staying with you. If she stays here till next week, I shall stay too; if she goes I shall probably go too."

"Where?" asked Mrs. Dalrymple, looking up at him with a puzzled yet anxious expression on her comely face.

"To Wareborough! to ask her father to consent to her engagement to me," he replied stoutly. "I shall either see him or write to him at once from here."

"But——" began Mrs. Dalrymple, coming to a dead stop.

"But what?"

"You can't marry two people."

"Certainly not. Has any one been telling you I intended doing so," he replied, beginning, in spite of his vexation, to laugh.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Dalrymple, naively. "At least, not exactly that. But I was

told some time ago that you were to be married to my cousin Roma next month, and of course I believed it. Eugenia thinks so too."

"Eugenia thinks so too," repeated Captain Chancellor, his face darkening. "How can she possibly think so? And whoever told her such an infernal falsehood, I should like to know?" he went on angrily, for it was unspeakably annoying to him that any shadow, however distorted, of his late relations to Roma should thus follow him about—should dim the brightness of the little-looked-for consolation that had offered itself.

Mrs. Dalrymple was by no means taken aback by this outburst. "It was I that told Eugenia," she said simply.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Beauchamp at once, his manner softening. "Of course you, too, were misinformed. I wonder——" he hesitated.

"You wonder by whom?" said his hostess. "There is no reason why I should not tell you. It was Mrs. Winter who mentioned it to me in a letter, as having been an-

nounced, or at least generally believed, at the Winsley Hunt Ball. And I had no reason to disbelieve it. To tell you the truth, it seemed to me to explain things a little."

Captain Chancellor did not inquire to what things she alluded. He took up the first part of her speech.

"Who is Mrs. Winter, may I ask? I don't think I ever heard of her."

"She is an old friend of mine," replied Mrs. Dalrymple. "Her husband is Major in the 19th Lancers, now at Sleigham. She wrote to thank me for having asked some of my friends near there to call on her—your sister especially—and in this letter she mentioned Roma's just announced engagement."

"But I am surprised you took such a piece of news at secondhand, my dear Mrs. Dalrymple," said Beauchamp. "Had it been true, Roma would have been sure to write to tell you."

"I don't know that she would," replied Roma's cousin. "We do not write very

often, and I know she has a large circle of friends. You might as well say it was strange of me not to write to congratulate her. I did think of doing so, but other things put it out of my head. Eugenia Laurence's illness for one thing—I was very anxious about her—and to tell you the real truth, Beauchamp," she went on, with a sudden change of tone, and addressing him as she had been accustomed to do in his boyhood, "I did not feel very able to congratulate either you or Roma as heartily as I should have wished to do in such circumstances, considering all I had seen and observed during your stay at Wareborough. I believe now I may have done you great injustice, and I fear poor dear Eugenia had suffered unnecessarily through me. But I think you will both forgive me," and she smiled up at him with all her old cordiality.

Captain Chancellor smiled too, with visible consciousness of no small magnanimity in so doing.

"All's well that ends well," he answered lightly, "though certainly in such matters it

is best to take nothing on hearsay, and to be slow to pronounce on apparently inconsistent conduct," he added rather mysteriously. "I must confess, however, that I can't understand Miss Laurence believing this absurd report—if she had done so till she met me again even, but after our—our conversation this morning?" he looked inquiringly at Mrs. Dalrymple.

"Yes, she believes it at the present moment," replied she. "You said something which seemed to confirm it—about 'breaking ties,' or something of the kind."

"Did I?" he said, colouring a little, and not altogether pleased at so much having been repeated by Eugenia to her friend. "It is a little hard upon one to have to explain all one's expressions at all sorts of times, you know. Of course what I said referred entirely to what my friends may think of it—Gertrude for instance—the imprudence and all that sort of thing. Of course till Gertrude *sees* Eugenia, it is natural for her to think a good deal about the outside part of it—prospects and position,

you know. There is the strong prejudice against Wareborough and places of the kind, in the first place."

In saying this he forgot for the moment whom he was speaking to; or if he thought of her at all, it was as Mary Pevensey, not as Mrs. Dalrymple, the wife of the Wareborough mill-owner. She looked up quickly, but she had long ago learnt indifference to such allusions on her own score. Eugenia's position, however, might be more open to discomfort therefrom.

"Then I advise Gertrude to get rid of all such prejudices at once," said the Wareborough lady, somewhat sharply.

Captain Chancellor did not reply. He might have smoothed down the little awkwardness by some judicious hint of apology, but he was not inclined to take the trouble; he was beginning to think he had had quite enough of his old friend for the present. She had shown a somewhat undesirable readiness to place herself *in loco matris* towards Eugenia, one of whose attractions, to his mind, lay in the fact that marriage

with her entailed upon him no Wareborough or other matron in the shape of mother-in-law.

He got up from his chair and strolled to the window. "It looks very like rain," he observed amiably. "May I see Miss Laurence now, Mrs. Dalrymple?"

Mrs. Dalrymple looked uneasy—it was quite as bad as, or rather worse, she thought, than, if her twelve-year-old Minnie were grown up! In that case, at least, she could feel that the responsibility was a natural and unavoidable one, and, if she behaved unwisely, no one would have any right to scold her but Henry; but in the present instance—suppose Mr. Laurence took it in his head to blame her for allowing matters to go so far without his consent? On the other hand, her soft heart was full of compassion for Eugenia, and eagerness to see her happy. Captain Chancellor read her hesitation.

"You need not feel any responsibility about it," he said. "To all intents and purposes I assure you the thing is done. I have already written to Mr. Laurence," he

took a letter out of his pocket and held it up to her, "and really it is too late to stop my seeing Eugenia. My chief reason for wishing to do so is to clear up the extraordinary misapprehension you told me of. It is only fair to me to let me put all that right. And it would be only cruel to her to leave things as they are. She is not strong, and I can't bear her to suffer any more."

The genuine anxiety in the last few words carried the day.

"I didn't think of not explaining things to her," said Mrs. Dalrymple, rising irresolutely from her seat as she spoke. "*I* could have done that. However, I daresay it is better for you to see her yourself."

"I am quite sure it is," said Captain Chancellor. "And to confess all my wickedness to you, had you prevented my seeing Miss Laurence here openly, I should, I assure you, have done my best to see her some other way. You could not have put a stop to either of us walking in the gardens, for instance?"

He smiled as he said it; there was a little

defiance in the smile. Mrs. Dalrymple sighed gently, and shook her head.

"You were always a very self-willed little boy, Beauchamp," she remarked, as she at last departed on her errand. Then she put her head in again at the door with a second thought.

"You will not blame me if Eugenia does not wish to see you at once?" she said. "She has been very much upset this morning, and perhaps it may be better to let her rest a little, and see you this evening."—"And by then Henry will be back," she added in her own mind, with a cowardly sense of satisfaction that in that case her lord and master would go shares in the possible blame.

"By all means beg Miss Laurence to do just as she likes," replied Beauchamp, urbanely. "I can call again at any hour this evening she likes to name, if she prefers it to seeing me now."

His misgivings, however, were of the slenderest. When he was left alone, he strolled again to the window, and stood


looking out, but without seeing much of what was before him. He was thinking, more deeply perhaps than he had ever thought before; and when at last he heard the sound of the door opening softly, he started and looked round, not without a certain anxiety. But it was as he had expected, Eugenia herself,—and, oh, what a transfigured Eugenia! Never yet had he seen her as he saw her now. Notwithstanding the still evident fragility of her appearance, there was about her whole figure a brightness, a soft radiance of happiness impossible to describe. Her brown hair seemed to have gained new golden lights; her eyes, always sweet, looked deeper and yet more brilliant; there was a flush of carnation in her cheeks over which lugubrious Major Thanet would have shaken his head, which Beauchamp at the moment thought lovelier than any rose-tint he had ever seen.

She came forward quickly,—more quickly than he advanced to meet her. He seemed almost startled by her beauty, and looked

at her for a moment without speaking. He could hardly understand her perfect absence of self-consciousness, her childlike "abandon" of overwhelming joy.

"Beauchamp, oh, Beauchamp," she exclaimed, as their hands met, "she has told me it was all a mistake, and, oh, I am so very happy!"

So she was, unutterably happy. Life for her, she felt, could hold no more perfect moment than this, and that there could be anything unbecoming in expressing her happiness, above all to him to whom she owed it, who shared it, as she believed, to the full, never in the faintest degree occurred to her. She did not think her lover cold or less fervent in his rejoicing than herself; she trusted him too utterly for such an idea to be possible to her, even had there been more cause for it than there really was. For, after the first instant, Captain Chancellor found it easy to respond to her expressions of thankfulness and delight; found it too by no means an unpleasing experience to be hailed by this lovely




creature as the hero of her dreams, the fairy prince whom even yet she could hardly believe had chosen her—a very Cinderella as she seemed to herself in comparison with him—out of all womankind to be his own. And, even if a shade more reserve, a trifle more dignity, would have been better in accordance with his taste, his notion of the perfectly well-bred bearing in such circumstances, after all, was there not every excuse for such innocent shortcoming, such sweet forgetfulness? She was so young, he reflected, had seen nothing, or worse than nothing, of society,—for far better for a girl to be brought up in a convent than in the mixed society of a place like Wareborough,—it was only a marvel to see her as she was. And deeper than these reflections lay another consciousness of excuse in his mind, which yet, even to himself, he would have shrunk from the bad taste of putting into words,—the consciousness that it was not every girl whose bridegroom elect was a Beauchamp Chancellor!

“What a child it is!” he murmured to

himself, as he stroked back the sunny brown hair from the white temples, and looked smilingly down into the liquid depths of the sweet, loving eyes. There would be a great deal to teach her, he thought to himself; some things perhaps he must help her to unlearn; but with such a pupil the prospect of the task before him was not appalling. Suddenly there recurred to him the memory of the misapprehension of his words of which Mrs. Dalrymple had told him. This must be set right at once,—his *fiancée* must be taught to view such things differently, to recognise the established feelings of the world—his world—on such matters.

“Eugenia, my dearest,” he began, rather gravely, and the gravity reflected itself in her face as instantly as a passing cloud across the sun is mirrored in the clear water of the lake beneath, “I want to ask you one thing. How could you distrust me, misinterpret me so, as Mrs. Dalrymple tells me you did?”

“I never for an instant distrusted you,” she answered quickly. “At the worst—at the very worst—I never doubted you. I



believed you were bound in some way,—bound by ties which in honour you could not break ; but, Beauchamp, I never blamed you, or doubted that we should not have been separated had it been in your power to avoid it. Distrust you? Oh, no ; I knew too well. I judged you by myself.”

“My darling!” he replied, kissing her again. Her sentiments were very pretty, very romantic, and so forth, and not objectionable considering she was a woman, but still hardly to the purpose. And, woman though she was, she must learn to take less poetical and high-flown, more conventional and “accepted,” views of things. Yet notwithstanding his pleasing sense of masculine superiority, he had winced a little inwardly while she spoke. For a moment there flashed before him an impulse of perfect honesty and candour, a temptation to tell her what small ground she had had for this innocent faith of hers,—a sort of yearning to be loved by her for what he was, and no more.

“But, no,” he decided, “it would not do.

If she once heard about Roma, she would never forget it. It would spoil all. If she did not resent my admiration for Roma, she would resent my having amused myself and her at Wareborough with what I never then dreamt would end seriously with either of us, at the very time I was counting on all coming straight with the other. She would never believe that I really cared for her, as most certainly I do. No, it would never do. Her head, poor dear, is cram-full of belief in first love and only love, and all the rest of the school-girl creed, and I am sure I don't want to disturb it, or to awake any nonsensical jealousy."

For that the green-eyed, hydra-headed monster lies *somewhere* sleeping in every woman's heart, Captain Chancellor doubted as little as that there are fish in the sea or smouldering fires in Mount Vesuvius. And that no wife has a right to peep behind the closed door of her husband's previous life, or to resent exclusion therefrom, was another of his not-to-be-disputed axioms. So he only smiled and called her his darling, and

put away from him the momentary impulse to risk all by confiding to her the true history of the events and feelings of the last few months.

“But in another sense you distrusted me,” he went on after a little pause, speaking gravely again and with some hesitation, as if fearful of hurting her; “how could you reconcile my — my manner to you this morning with what you were then believing about me?”

“I didn’t reconcile it,” answered Eugenia, naïvely; “I only thought, as I had done before, that honour and inclination were pointing different ways;” here she stopped abruptly and blushed crimson. “It sounds dreadfully conceited to say this,” she added, “but you asked me, and I *must* tell you everything now, must not I? I was so bitterly sorry for you, and, oh, so miserable myself.”

It was a little hard to say anything but sweet words to this, but Beauchamp persevered.

“But don’t you see, dearest, had it been

as you thought, I could not have broken my pledge without the grossest dishonour? Perhaps you hardly understand how these things are looked upon in the world, you are so young and innocent, and perhaps a tiny little bit too romantic," here he stroked her cheek fondly, "but you will learn that there are some things men of honour *cannot* do, not even to win such a darling as you."

The crimson, hardly yet faded from the girl's face, deepened almost painfully. She was silent for a moment, and when she spoke it seemed to cost her a little effort.

"I am ignorant, very ignorant," she said gently. "But there are some things it doesn't require years or experience to know. I trust you will not find me ignorant in these. Don't think I thought you capable of breaking your word—not even for me," with a little smile and an attempt at playfulness, "but I thought——" she hesitated; "I have read that even the noblest and best may be terribly drawn two ways sometimes—there may come to the best of us tremendous temptations, may there not? Could

the best people ever get to be the best if they had not felt temptation more strongly than others? And then, too, though one hardly likes to say so, there do seem sometimes to come times when ordinary rules—not real right and wrong of course, but our way of interpreting them—seem to fail one; when keeping one's word in one direction would be breaking it more unpardonably in another. Oh no, no, if I could put in words what I felt for and thought of you this morning, you would see I did you no dishonour."

There was a pathetic appeal in her tone as she uttered the last few words; she had said more than she intended, carried away by her subject, and the remembrance of the battle of feelings she herself had so recently fought her way through. Captain Chancellor was a little puzzled, a little annoyed, and a little surprised. It was not quite so easy to assert his superiority as he had imagined. Instinctively he sheltered himself by taking it for granted.

"My darling," he said again, "don't distress yourself. Don't imagine I meant

to blame you. I only meant there are things and ways of looking at things which your innocence cannot have had experience of. But this need trouble neither of us now—you will never be alone now, even in thought. You will always trust me, dearest?"

"Yes," whispered Eugenia, softly, "and you will teach me all I don't know, and teach me to be better too, more worthy of you."

Captain Chancellor was enchanted. There was a docility about this sweet Eugenia of his, which he might have sought for long and vainly among more sophisticated maidens. She looked more irresistibly lovely than ever at this moment; there was a tender dewiness in her eyes which might turn into tears were it not kissed away, so he lost no time in averting the possible catastrophe. And Eugenia accepted his caresses and smiled her happiness, and stifled far, far away, down in the very furthest off corner of her heart, a little silly, absurd pain, an infinitesimal feeling of disappointment that

she had not been *quite* perfectly understood—stifled it so determinedly that she thought she had forgotten its having had even a momentary existence.

It was not till she was alone again—Beauchamp having departed to post his letter to her father—alone with her happiness, feeling almost overwhelmed by Mrs. Dalrymple's congratulations and affectionate excitement (for Mary was too kind-hearted to obtrude the wet blanket of her somewhat uncomfortable sense of responsibility), that there recurred to Eugenia the remembrance of the expressions made use of by her lover, which had helped to continue the mystification regarding his relations with Miss Eyrecourt.

What could he have meant, she said to herself, by his allusions to ties which must be broken, obstacles to be overcome? She knew of none; her father, she felt satisfied, would never dream of opposing her wishes, would do all in his power to promote her happiness.

"I will ask Beauchamp to-morrow," she

thought, and then again discarded the idea. She had a certain shrinking from alluding, however slightly, to the misapprehension which had cost her so much. Could it be that his friends had other views for him, and would be disappointed by his choice? "It may be so," she thought; "I am neither rich nor grand. I should not wonder if his relations wish him to marry Miss Eyre-court; or, possibly, he is afraid that his marriage may interfere with his getting on in his profession. *That* he need not fear, I would never consent to be in his way. That is not my idea of a good wife," and she smiled confidently, as many another untried girl has smiled, at the thought of all she could do and suffer, and make the best of, for his sake. None of her reflections cast any shadow on her joy.

"We love each other, that is all that matters. And if there are any difficulties in the way, which I should know of, he will tell me, and if he does not, I can trust him."

The very next morning there came, forwarded from Wareborough to Mrs. Dal-

rymple, a letter from Mrs. Winter, in which after the usual feminine amount of irrelevant matter, she went on to say, "I have often wondered how soon you found out the incorrectness of the report about Miss Eyrecourt's engagement to Captain Chancellor. Indeed, it has been rather on my mind to set it right with you, but the very day after I last wrote I was called away to nurse my mother, and the last six weeks have been entirely spent in the sick-room," &c., &c. "And besides, as you are so nearly connected with the young lady, you are quite sure to have heard it was only a piece of local gossip."

Eugenia smiled when her friend showed her the letter.

"How queerly things are twisted up together," she said, but she was happy enough now to forget all the past, save as enhancing the present. She was perfectly satisfied with Beauchamp's explanation (he did not feel called upon to make it a very ample one) of his inconsistent conduct: his misgivings as to the wisdom of marrying on

his limited means, his ignorance of the real state of her feelings towards him, his anxiety to take no such step without the approval of the sister to whom he owed so much—all good reasons and founded on fact as far as they went.

“I hope your sister will like me,” said Eugenia, thoughtfully. “It is with her Miss Eyrecourt lives, is it not? I think I liked Miss Eyrecourt, at least I think so *now*,” with a smile and a blush which made her lover congratulate himself on his reticence.

Mr. Dalrymple and Major Thanet both opened their eyes when they heard the news.

“Well, my dear,” said the former, oracularly, “I trust you will never have reason to regret your share in the affair;” but to the young people themselves he was “mean” enough to be profusely congratulatory.

“Just like a man,” thought poor Mrs. Dalrymple. “If Henry were the least given to clairvoyance, and that sort of thing, I should really think he went off yesterday

on purpose that he might be able to put the responsibility on to me."

Captain Chancellor's friend did not mince the matter. He had scented one of Beauchamp's little "affaires," but the actual dénouement so suddenly announced to him by his companion was rather startling.

"Going to be married," he exclaimed; "and this morning you had as much idea of anything of the kind—at least in *this* quarter," pointedly, "as—as," the gallant officer hesitated, at a loss for a sufficiently forcible expression, "as I have of marrying the man in the moon."

Beauchamp laughed shortly and contemptuously. Major Thanet's perceptions were not of the quickest.

"Are you sure you know what you are about, my dear fellow?" he inquired confidentially.

"Perfectly, thank you," answered Captain Chancellor, and the tone of the three words was unmistakable. So Major Thanet took his cue, and not being behind the rest of the world in his capability of "bearing per-

fectly like a Christian the misfortunes of another," resigned himself with a cigar, and a sigh over "Chancellor's infatuation," to the apparently inevitable, and being introduced to Eugenia a day or two after by her fiancé, congratulated her with as much graceful fervour as if no piece of news of the kind had ever in his life afforded him such unmingled satisfaction.

Eugenia thought him charming, seeing him through the flattering medium of his position as one of Beauchamp's oldest friends, and was a very little surprised that the cordiality of her expressions regarding him hardly appeared as gratifying to her lover as she could have expected.

"Am I too outspoken, Beauchamp?" she ventured to inquire. "You don't think me 'gushing,' I hope?" with a little smile, but some anxiety, and his answer, "Never to *me*," was scarcely reassuring.

"I will try to learn to be more dignified and—and more reserved, or whatever it is my manner is wanting in," she said, penitentially. And then the tiny cloud cleared

off Beauchamp's face, and he told her she could never in *his* eyes be nearer perfection than she was already, and all was sunshine again — sunshine almost too brilliant and dazzling, with a want of the steady glow about it which tells of the settled maturity of summer ; reminding one rather of the flashing radiance of uncertain April "with his shoures," "April, when men woo"—sunshine, nevertheless, which brought back the roses to Eugenia's cheeks, and added new radiance to her beautiful eyes.





CHAPTER VII.

FAIT ACCOMPLI.

Things without all remedy
Should be without regard : what's done is done.

Macbeth.

AND thus it came about that Eugenia returned home to Wareborough the week before her sister's marriage, a very picture of radiant happiness.

"How little we imagined what was to be the end of my visit to Nunswell ! Do you remember how dreadfully unwilling I was to go ?" she said to Sydney, when they were alone together for the first time the evening she came home.

And Sydney smiled back to her, and tried her best to be sympathising in joy as in sorrow, and Eugenia was too intensely happy to discover that there was any effort required


on her sister's part, or that it was not entirely successful.

Contrary to the usual course of true love at the critical stage when fathers are applied to, and ways and means have to be considered, there occurred no difficulties threatening to overthrow Eugenia's new-found happiness; or rather perhaps, such as there were, were smoothed away by her friends' kindness. Her father, at all times indulgent in intention, had had his somewhat undemonstrative affection quickened into activity by his anxiety during her illness, and was too delighted to see the change in her to lay much stress on the fact of Captain Chancellor's very limited means. And Beauchamp on his side was somewhat agreeably disappointed by Mr. Laurence's generosity.

"I am not a rich man," said Eugenia's father, "and now that my children are grown up I sometimes take blame to myself that I am not a richer, I might have been so perhaps, but though nearly all my life has been spent in this place where money-making is the great object, I never caught the fever,"

here he smiled, and Captain Chancellor wondered in his own mind what on earth any one could find of interest in Wareborough, setting aside "the great object" to which his future father-in-law alluded thus contemptuously. "I am not ambitious," continued Mr. Laurence, "either for myself or my children," Beauchamp stared a little, "but I am very anxious to see them happy, and nothing but very grave objections would make me interfere with their wishes. I am perfectly satisfied with Sydney's choice, and, though of course I have had much less opportunity of knowing you than has been the case as regards Frank Thurston, I trust, I think I may say I believe, I shall feel the same with Eugenia's."

He looked at Captain Chancellor with a half-inquiry. The young man, though not feeling particularly flattered, bowed silently. But catching sight again of Mr. Laurence's eyes, the sort of appeal, of wistful anxiety in their expression, came home to him and awoke his better nature. It was impossible to take offence at the plain-speaking of so



straightforward and single-minded a man as Eugenia's father, eccentric though he might be, so Beauchamp answered gently and respectfully—

“I hope with all my heart, my dear sir, that you will indeed feel so. I think I can answer for myself that I shall do my best, my very best, to make her happy.”

He held out his hand to Mr. Laurence as he spoke, as if in ratification of the treaty. The older man took it and shook it, after the manner of Englishmen in moments of strong feeling, vigorously. Then they both looked at each other again.

“He's by no means an unpresentable father-in-law, Wareborough-bred though he is,” thought Beauchamp, feeling sufficiently pleased with himself to see other people in a rose-coloured light.

And “I do not wonder at Eugenia,” was the reflection that passed through her father's mind.

For Beauchamp looked his very best just now. There was a kindly light in his blue eyes, which added greatly to their attractive-

ness, a slight air of deference had replaced his usual calm, somewhat supercilious self-possession ; he looked altogether younger and brighter and heartier.

He felt rewarded for the amiability and tact (a quality on the possession of which he rather prided himself) he had shown, when Mr. Laurence proceeded to touch upon practical matters. The sum he named as the yearly allowance he intended to settle on Eugenia exceeded Captain Chancellor's expectations, if indeed he may be said to have had any ; for when habitually calculating, self-considering persons act upon impulse, throwing prudence to the winds, their recklessness is apt to exceed that of more impetuous natures—a certain mortification at having disregarded their accepted rule of conduct renders the remembrance of the inconsistency unpalatable ; for the time being they bury all practical considerations out of sight. So Beauchamp was perfectly sincere, and Mr. Laurence could see that he was so, when he exclaimed—

“You are very generous, very generous

indeed. I had no idea of anything so liberal. Indeed, to tell the truth, I fear I gave little thought to this part of the matter at all" (for now that his rashness had not turned out so badly, after all, he began to be rather proud of it). "I suppose," with a smile, "I thought only of Eugenia herself. But of course—for *her* sake—I don't hesitate to say I am very glad of what you tell me—very glad indeed."

And the interview ended with mutual satisfaction.

"Yes," thought Beauchamp, as he returned to the drawing-room, where Eugenia was awaiting the result of the tête-à-tête in "papa's study," not, it must be confessed, with any great amount of anxiety, for her faith in her father was great, her ignorance of money matters unlimited — "Yes," thought Captain Chancellor, "we shall be able to scrub on. After all of course it will be only what Gertrude calls 'genteel starvation.' How she used to ring the changes on that for Roma's benefit! But Eugenia will have quite as much as *she* would have

had, and with much less expensive tastes. And in the old days, when I was determined to marry Roma, I used to make out it would not be so very bad. Of course there is the difference in other ways, position and connection and all that, to be taken into account, but after all—— ”

“ After all ” things looked well enough for him to respond very cheerfully to Eugenia’s eager inquiries, to add a few more drops of bliss to her already brimming-over cup, by his praises of her father’s generosity.

As must be expected, however, in all human affairs, there came by-and-by tiny clouds to temper the brilliance of Eugenia’s sky, slight pricks of disappointment to make themselves felt amidst the luxuriance and fragrance of the flowers she had grasped so eagerly. The first of these that she perceived was the want of cordiality in Gerald Thurston’s manner when he, as he could not avoid, congratulated her on her engagement. She had looked forward with some eagerness to seeing him, had counted upon his sympathy, had even rehearsed a little girlish

speech referring gratefully to his kindness to her in her trouble, her hope that he would extend his friendship to Beauchamp as well as continue it to herself. But when she met him, and heard his few formal words of good wishes, her pretty expressions died upon her lips ; she felt herself blushing painfully, and demeaned herself—at least so she afterwards declared to Sydney—as if she had done something she was ashamed of and that he was reproaching her. And Sydney did not smooth her ruffled plumage. Eugenia's complete misapprehension of Gerald irritated her sometimes almost unreasonably, and just now the irritation was increased by pity for the new disappointment she imagined him to be enduring. So when Eugenia complained of Mr. Thurston's "brusqueness" and coldness, Sydney answered stiffly and unsympathizingly that she thought it a pity Eugenia judged people so much by "mere outside manner."

"You have known Gerald long enough to know how good and true he is, and how interested in our happiness. I don't see

that one's friends are obliged to go into ecstasies over the news of one's engagement. Marrying, in nine cases out of ten, is the death of all previous friendships and connections."

"But it should not be, it need not be," interposed Eugenia, eagerly. "It will not be so with me, you will see, Sydney," and had it been any other day in the world than the one it was—the eve of Sydney's marriage, the last, the very last of the sisterly life together in the old home—she would have felt inclined to reproach her for her want of faith, her commonplace axioms. As if marriages in general could furnish grounds for prophecy as to the probable influence of marriage on the wife of a Beauchamp Chancellor!

The next morning's post brought disappointment No. 2, in the shape of a letter from the hero himself.

He had left Wareborough a few days before, being obliged to report himself at Bridgenorth, but had done so with the promise of returning for Sydney's marriage.

Between his future sister-in-law and himself there was no great congeniality ; circumstances had from the outset of their acquaintance prejudiced her against him, and he, even had he known this to be the case, would hardly have thought it worth his while to try to win her liking. In his own mind he set her down as a nice little thing, well fitted to be a clergyman's wife, and "not bad looking;" and had he received the very undesirable "giftie" of seeing himself with Sydney's eyes, his astonishment at her presumption would have been extreme. He had agreed to make one of the wedding guests, therefore, out of no special regard for the bride, but because it seemed to be expected by Eugenia and the others; not being, to do him justice, of the aggressively cross-grained order of individuals who, when pleasing people or doing what seems expected of them comes in their way, are forthwith seized with a desire, at whatever inconvenience to themselves, to avoid the suspicion of amiability by taking another road. Nevertheless, when Beauchamp found

himself prevented making one at the feast, he by no means took it greatly to heart or felt any inclination to "beat his breast" with chagrin. That he did not do so, which was pretty evident from the tone of his letter, was what added the sting to Eugenia's sharp disappointment; for that the obstacle in the way of his joining them was insurmountable there could be no doubt.

A more inexorable power than even the Ancient Mariner, with the "long grey beard and glittering eye," had forbidden the presence of Eugenia's lover at the wedding. He had intended leaving Bridgenorth late the previous evening, sleeping at an hotel in Wareborough, and presenting himself at Mr. Laurence's house the following morning in time to see his beautiful Eugenia in her bridesmaid's bravery and to accompany the wedding party to the church. But two hours before he was to leave the barracks he received a letter which completely changed his plans. It was from his sister, in answer merely, he thought on first seeing the ad-

dress, to the one he had sent her announcing his engagement to Miss Laurence. He had awaited it with some anxiety; he opened it with considerable misgiving. First of all he came upon a smaller envelope enclosed in the larger. The letter it contained proved, to his surprise, to be from Roma.

“MY DEAR BEAUCHAMP,” it began—

“Gertrude has told me the news about you. I am surprised, and yet I am not. Miss Laurence is beautiful and clever and good. What more can I say in the way of congratulation? Perhaps even this much is more than you will care to receive from me, but we are very old friends, Beauchamp, and I am completely in earnest in saying I hope you will both be very happy. If Miss Laurence remembers me, or if you care to tell her who I am, will you tell her, too, that I shall look forward to knowing her, and to really ‘making friends,’ if she will let me?—Believe me,

“Yours affectionately,

“ROMA ALICE EYRECOURT.”

It was a pleasant little letter to receive, pleasant in a special sense to Beauchamp, for it was evident to him that Roma had exerted herself—her tact and discrimination—to render it so, and the reflection soothed his still sore feeling towards her. He felt, too, that she really meant what she said and expressed, and he was right in thinking so. Roma was very sincere in her good wishes.

“So this is the end of it,” she had said to herself, after doing her best to pour oil on the waters of Mrs. Eyrecourt’s extreme disgust and unreasonable indignation. “Well, certainly, though I think it one of the most foolish marriages I ever heard of, which is saying a good deal; though I think them in every particular, except good looks, utterly unsuited to each other—and the chances are it will not take them long to find that out for themselves—yet I must say I never liked Beauchamp as much, or thought as well of him, as just now that he has done this most foolish thing. And, though I am perfectly certain there is not the ghost of a chance

that it will be so, I really do earnestly hope they may be happy."

Then another remembrance occurred to her—"That infatuatedly faithful Mr. Thurston, how will he take this, poor man, I wonder?" she thought, smiling slightly as she recalled him, for it is a curious fact that women can never pity Corydon's woes—

"He would love, and she would not,"

without laughing at him a little too, even though he be, apart from Phillida, by no means a ludicrous or contemptible personage.

Beauchamp smiled as he read Roma's sisterly little letter. Then, not without reluctance, he put it aside and took up Mrs. Eyrecourt's. The first part was pretty much what he had expected, or at least feared. She began by saying that the news of his engagement had so completely taken her by surprise that she really did not know what to say—perhaps, as he had so entirely avoided consulting her in this most important step, the less she said the better—after

which preamble, as might have been expected, she went on to say a great deal. She did not write unkindly or coldly, she was most careful in the few allusions she could not avoid making to his fiancée, to say nothing exaggerated or in bad taste—nothing which could arouse his masculine spirit of contradiction or defiance. Such as it was, and judged “according to the lights” of the woman who had written it and the man to whom it was written, it was by no means a bad letter, hardly even a selfish or one-sided or “wholly worldly” production. The first vehemence of Gertrude’s wrath had been expended on poor Roma, a convenient safety-valve, and, thanks to her sympathy and patience, had considerably subsided before Mrs. Eyrecourt had arrived at pen and paper. So her brother was fain to confess “there was a good deal of truth in what Gertrude said,” and he sighed quite pathetically as he came to this conclusion. Only, and he brightened up again at this, she had not yet seen Eugenia; no doubt once she did so it would be all

right. Miss Laurence had but to show herself, and the victory would be achieved ; she would find no resistance—it would be a case of simply “walking over the ground” of Mrs. Eyrecourt’s prejudices. For Gertrude was not a small woman in the sense of any petty jealousy of another’s attractions. She was nearly as sensitive as Beauchamp himself to beauty, and upon this he determined to trade.

“I shall not attempt defending myself or the wisdom of what I have done,” he reflected. “I shall say nothing at all but that she must wait till she sees Eugenia. Then if she takes a fancy to her she will make a pet of her, enjoy taking her out and all that sort of thing, and it will all be as smooth sailing as possible. Of course Eugenia will throw herself completely into my side of the house, and not bother about Wareborough. That is the beauty of marrying a girl who has seen nothing and is better than her surroundings.”

So, sanguinely mused Captain Chancellor, and all the while there was news at the end

of his sister's letter which had escaped his observation, news which was to alter the whole colour of his future, which, so far as regarded Mrs. Eyrecourt's friendly feelings to Eugenia, could not possibly have come at a worse time. He thought he had read it all, but, taking it up again, he saw that there was a lengthy postscript, written hurriedly, and here and there almost illegibly.

"I was just closing this for the bag," ran the postscript, "when the afternoon letters came. I am so thankful I did not go out! I was very nearly doing so, and then I should have missed the post. There is most distressing news from Halswood. You will hardly believe it, Beauchamp, it seems so frightfully sudden, but it is really true—Herbert Chancellor is dead. My letter is from Addie, poor darling! They are in a terrible state of course. It was some sort of fit or stroke, and he such a young man! But you remember how stout he was growing when they were here. They had only gone to Halswood for a few days to see about re-furnishing it, and poor Addie says her

mother will never be able to endure the place again. They want you to go there *at once*, to help them in all sorts of ways. They have no one to look to but that poor sickly boy, Roger, and of course you are the natural person. I must say I feel gratified at their remembering this. They would have written or telegraphed to you direct, but did not know your address, and Addie said she tried to telegraph to me but could not explain. The funeral is to be on Friday, so you have no time to lose. I am going, too, to poor dear Mrs. Chancellor as soon as I can, so we shall meet at Halswood to-morrow or the day after."

Then came a second postscript :—

"I almost hesitate now about sending the first part of this letter, but perhaps it is as well to let it go. But do not let anything I have said hurt you, dearest Beauchamp. We can talk over all so much more satisfactorily, and I am sure you will believe I am only anxious to advise you for your good."

Captain Chancellor started to his feet,

threw the letter aside with an impatient exclamation, opened the door, and shouted to his servant to get him a Bradshaw at once and to hurry on with his packing; then returned to his room, deliberately filled and lighted his pipe, and set to work to collect his ideas. First of all he must write to Eugenia, explaining his unavoidable absence on the morrow, then he must find out the next train to Crumby, the great junction whence he must make his way to Halswood. It was very unfortunate, he thought to himself; peculiarly so at this crisis. He was really sorry to hear of Herbert's death—the kindly, prosperous man so suddenly struck down—it was very melancholy and uncomfortable, and, he repeated, most peculiarly unfortunate that it should have happened just now. He understood Gertrude perfectly well; her “accidental” allusion to “that poor sickly Roger,” her sudden change to “dearest Beauchamp,” and promise of “advice.”

“Advice!” exclaimed Captain Chancellor, “what ‘advice’ do I want? The thing is

done—'fait accompli'—and no more to be said about it. Can't she understand that? However, if she doesn't, I'll take care that she does without loss of time."

Then he wrote to Eugenia the letter which chilled her with its apparent indifference, feeling himself the while a rather badly-used person and very much inclined to quarrel with Gertrude.

"Faugh!" he exclaimed, as he glanced again over Mrs. Eyrecourt's letter. "'Poor darling Addie!' If anything could be wanting to make me more in earnest about Eugenia—supposing, that is to say, that there were any possibility of drawing back—it would be the sight of that fat girl, with her silly giggle and doll's face."

So Sydney Laurence's wedding-day came and went. It was spent by Beauchamp Chancellor amidst the afflicted family at Halswood; poor Addie, who had truly loved her father, treating him to tears instead of giggles, her widowed mother to lamentations over her desolate state—"these two enormous properties and no male relation

to relieve her of the burden of their management," and embarrassingly broad hints of her wishes "that Addie were married to some one she could look upon as a son, some one her dear father would have approved of," till Beauchamp found himself devoutly wishing he had made any excuse under heaven or earth to have avoided this painful visit to his relatives. For he was really sorry for them all ; for poor Roger, whom he now saw for the first time—about whose delicate health there could be no doubt, and whose heart seemed broken by this great sorrow—perhaps most of all, and would have been glad to have cheered them.

"They are all so fond of you, Beauchamp," said Mrs. Eyrecourt, when they were alone together, the evening after the funeral—Captain Chancellor was to leave the next morning—"they seem to look to you so naturally. It is really very gratifying to find that Herbert had made you Roger's guardian. He is terribly delicate, poor boy!"

"He *is* delicate, no doubt," said Beauchamp, rather shortly, "but these delicate

boys sometimes turn out perfectly strong men."

"Sometimes," said Gertrude, doubtfully. "He may do so, of course, but if he were my son I should be very unhappy about him. I should be very glad to see him grow stronger, poor boy, for his own sake and his mother's, but it looks to me very uncertain. That is just the trial, Beauchamp—the trial to me, I mean, of your position now—its uncertainty. Of course I cannot pretend that your interests are not far nearer and dearer to me than Roger's"—she was too wise to attempt to speak any but her true feelings to one who knew her so well as her brother, even had she been addicted to protestations of disinterestedness, which she was not—"I cannot pretend that it would not be very delightful to me to see you the head of our family, the owner of this beautiful place, but my great dread for you is that of an uncertain position. If I could but have secured for you what would have placed you above very much caring how things here turn out! That is my great wish. That is what Mrs.

Chancellor has the comfort of feeling with regard to her daughters' future, whether Roger lives or dies."

"Everything is uncertain," observed Beauchamp, "and there are some contingencies it is perhaps better not to think about." Mrs. Eyrecourt looked at him inquiringly and a little suspiciously: she did not understand this new tone of philosophy of his. He went on speaking: "Not that I quite know what you are alluding to when you speak of placing my future above uncertainty?"

He had a pretty shrewd notion what she was thinking of; her last few words had shown him that he was in for the "talking it over," the "advice" she had volunteered, and he felt anxious to hear all she had to say and have done with it. Gertrude hesitated.

"Suppose we take a turn outside, up and down the avenue—it looks tempting, and it is wofully gloomy indoors," said Beauchamp, glancing round the room in which they were standing. It was a depressing room, a library crowded to excess with dingy

volumes—many of them doubtless of great value, all of them originally handsome and well-bound, but bearing about them an unread, uncared-for look, filling the air with that faintly musty smell perceptible in libraries seldom entered but by servants, where fires are only lighted periodically to “keep out the damp,” where the sweet summer air but seldom enters. Of all rooms, a library lived in and loved, where the books are dear old friends, the window-seats little sanctuaries for quiet thought or earnest study—of all rooms perhaps, such a one is the most delightful. But the library at Halswood had been deserted and disregarded for many a long day. The Chancellors were not a studious or scholarly race, still they were not without refinement and cultivation; but for many years past Halswood had been the home of a half imbecile old man whose only acute intelligence had been that of hoarding, and the traces of his long neglect were everywhere visible.

Outside, pacing up and down the long avenue, whose grand old chestnuts were the

boast of the country-side, things certainly looked more attractive.

"It *is* a beautiful old place," said Beauchamp, stopping suddenly, and looking about him appreciatively, "though the house is desperately ugly. It looks as if it had been cut out of the middle of a street and stuck down here in this beautiful park by mistake. And the portico looks as if it, again, had nothing whatever to do with the house. I hate those great pillars so!—they look so meaningless. When was this house built, Gertrude, do you know?"

"Quite recently—that is to say, at the end of the last century," said Gertrude, "when everything was hideous. The old house was very picturesque; more like an enlarged edition of Winsley. Still, this house is a very *good* one, Beauchamp. Some of the rooms—the drawing-rooms—are very fine."

"Oh yes, it's well enough inside. No doubt it might be made very habitable," replied her brother, indifferently. Then, with an effort, "What is it you want to say to

me, Gertrude? Oh yes, by-the-bye, I remember. I was saying just now I did not quite understand your allusions to my future—to something you had had in your mind about it.”

“I did not intend to say it,” replied Gertrude; “it was only accidentally I said what I did. Of course you must see what I mean—what a bright future of assured comfort and ease, whatever happens or does not happen here, would be before you if you chose.”

“Yes, I see what you mean now,” answered Beauchamp. “There is no use beating about the bush, Gertrude. Once for all I tell you plainly that if I hadn’t a halfpenny in the world I could not marry Adelaide. I could not stand her a week. I should run away from her, and then where should we all be? No, truly, if any idea of this kind has increased your opposition to my marrying elsewhere I beg you to dismiss it. *That* I never could have done.”

Gertrude sighed. “You do not yourself know what you would or would not have

done had there been no other influences about you, Beauchamp. I don't understand you. First there was Roma, now, barely two months after that was made an end of, you want me to approve of your engaging yourself to another girl. You are very changeable and inconsistent."

Beauchamp had had a second thought about the expediency of quarrelling with his sister. So, though her accusation annoyed him, as he felt she had some grounds for making it, he kept down his vexation and answered quietly—

"I am sorry to have appeared so to you. As regards Roma, I own that I quite see now that that was a mistake from the beginning; the less said about it the better. As regards my present engagement——" he hesitated. "No, Gertrude, I don't expect you as yet to *approve* of it, but I hope you may do so in time. Wait till you see Eugenia."

"Seeing her cannot possibly alter the fact of your imprudence, though it may explain it," answered Mrs. Eyrecourt, coldly.

“Remember all I wrote to you. Oh, Beauchamp, do think what you are about! Even for *her* sake you should do so. You are not the sort of man to make the best of an unsuitable marriage when the time comes for you to awake to its being so.”

“I am perfectly awake already to everything that can be said about it,” replied Captain Chancellor, a little sullenly. “The long and the short of it is that she isn’t rich; that is the only ‘unsuitableness’ you can possibly suspect.”

“Not the only one, though of course it is an important one,” said Gertrude. “You have rushed into this so rashly that I have every reason to suspect the whole affair. She is young and pretty; that is about all you can bring forward.”

“We shall have enough to live on. You need not be afraid I intend to make any of my friends suffer for my imprudence,” answered Beauchamp, hastily. They were approaching very near the edge of a quarrel now.

“Then you allow it is imprudent?” ex-

claimed Gertrude, quickly. But Beauchamp saw his mistake and changed his tone.

"Yes," he said, "yes, in one sense I suppose I do. But, prudent or imprudent, Gertrude, it is *done*, absolutely and irrevocably. I have a great deal to thank you for in the past, and I shall be very sorry if my marriage causes any coldness between us. I shall thank you very much if you will be kind to my wife—she will have a good deal to learn and will appreciate kindness. But you must decide how things are to be between us."

"Oh, of course I don't mean to *quarrel* with you, Beauchamp," answered Mrs. Eyre-court, stiffly. "It is rather late in the day for that sort of thing. I shall be glad to see your wife when you are married, but I can't make any promises of romantic friendship and so on. I hope you will be happy, and I shall of course show any kindness I can to— to Miss Laurence when she is my sister-in-law; but you must take into account the great disparity between her and me—of

age and other things—and don't expect impossibilities. It is best to speak plainly, you know, and then you will not expect too much. I shall do all in my power, I assure you."

"Thank you," said Beauchamp, but without much gratification in his tone. He felt dissatisfied and uncomfortable, vexed with Gertrude, and yet more vexed that he could not exactly blame her. Her sentiments were neither exaggerated nor unreasonable; they were very much the same as what he had himself often expressed on similar subjects. Yet she had managed to take the bloom off his prospects, to insinuate a very unpleasant misgiving that after all he had *not* known what he was about. Gertrude read his feelings pretty correctly, but she derived little satisfaction from so doing. The thing was too far gone, she feared; of course there was the chance of the proverbial slip before the marriage actually took place, but so slender a contingency was not to be taken into account.

"No," thought Mrs. Eyrecourt, "it is sure to go through. Undesirable things always do, and these Wareborough people know what they are about."

In her heart she was not without some feminine curiosity about Eugenia herself, her belongings, and the history of the whole affair, but the tone she had taken up would not allow her to show any such undignified interest. So Beauchamp and she walked up and down for a few minutes in silence; then Gertrude discovered it was growing chilly and returned to the house, leaving her brother to his cigar and solitude.





CHAPTER VIII.

LOOKERS-ON.

Ah, love, there is no better life than this;
To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,

Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss?
SWINBURNE.

MRS. EYRECOURT drove her brother to the station the next morning in Addie's pretty pony-carriage, which had been sent from Wyling-ham for the two or three weeks the Chancellors had originally intended to spend at Halswood. Gertrude was gentle and affectionate, anxious apparently to prove to Beauchamp the truth of her words that, whatever she might think of his conduct, it was too late in the day for any talk of quarrelling or coldness between them. She studiously avoided the subject of the previous evening's conversation; only just

at the last, when their drive was all but at an end, she asked one question.

"You did not tell me, Beauchamp, when it—when your marriage—is likely to be?" she said, with some hesitation. "Is any time fixed? Do you think it will be soon?"

"Yes," answered Captain Chancellor, promptly; "I hope it will be very soon. Next month, if I can get leave, or in June. Long engagements are senseless when there is no reason for them."

"Only it is not always the lady and her friends are so obliging about making their preparations in a hurry," observed Mrs. Eyrecourt. It was the first snappish remark she had allowed herself, and she regretted it instantly, though Beauchamp did not allow her to see that it had nettled him.

"No," he said, coolly; "but then few girls are so free from home ties as Eugenia. Her life will be very lonely now, for her only sister is married, and I don't see why there should be any delay."

The truth was that the subject of the time for their marriage had not yet been

alluded to. He had answered his sister on the spur of the moment, from a sort of wish to prove to her how definite the thing was, how useless any remonstrance or interference would be, and it had not at the moment occurred to him that by what he had said he had given occasion for any inference of undignified haste on the part of Eugenia's family.

"Then I suppose it is possible—or probable even—that I shall not see you again as a bachelor?" said Gertrude, trying to speak lightly.

"That depends on your own movements. I have promised Mrs. Chancellor to run down to Wylingham for a couple of days before long. Perhaps you may be with them?"

Mrs. Eyrecourt shook her head. "I don't think so," she replied. "We go to town next week, and I cannot leave Roma alone there. Besides, I rather doubt their going back to Wylingham. I expect Mrs. Chancellor will go to the sea-side next week. Roger is not the least fit for school again, and they say sea-air suits him."

“Poor boy!” said Beauchamp; and they were both silent for a minute or two. Then he spoke again. “Mrs. Chancellor will let me know if she changes her plans, I have no doubt. But in any case, Gertrude, I shall see you before long? You will come to the marriage?”

“Shall you wish it? I should not like to be invited merely out of civility,” said Mrs. Eyrecourt. “And, besides, there will probably be a great many of Miss Laurence’s relations at it. They may not care about any more.”

“Nonsense!” said Beauchamp, wondering inwardly at the extraordinary attraction the making suffering saints of themselves seems to have for even otherwise sensible women; “nonsense, Gertrude! Of *course* I shall wish it, and of course Eugenia will too. And she has very few relations, as I have told you. Certainly I shall expect you.”

“Very well, dear Beauchamp; we shall see,” replied his sister, with unwonted meekness, and so they parted.

Gertrude had done one thing by what she

had said to her brother—she had hastened the very catastrophe she was most anxious to avert. When Captain Chancellor, a few days after his return from Halswood, went over to Wareborough for a night, it was with the determination to hurry on matters as fast as possible, and to fix the earliest date practicable for his marriage. He hardly understood why he did so, and, if he tried to find a reason for this impetuosity, pretended to himself that it was the proper thing in the circumstances. That he was really influenced by any doubt of himself, any misgivings as to the result, in his case, of a long engagement, the course of which might see events greatly affecting his future, he would not allow even to himself. And there was, perhaps, some excuse for his deliberate self-deception, for no sooner was he in Eugenia's presence and under the influence of her beauty and sweetness than every shadow of a cloud disappeared from his horizon.

So it was decided that they should be married in June. Eugenia was so com-

pletely under her lover's influence that whatever he proposed seemed to her wisest and best ; and though some suggestions were mooted by Mr. Laurence as to the advisability of the young people's "seeing a little more of each other" before entering on that most solemn of bonds, companionship for life, there was no one at hand to support him in such an old-fashioned idea, and Captain Chancellor's opinion that the deed "were well done quickly" encountered no important opposition. For Sydney and her husband were away on the clerical honeymoon of four weeks barring a Sunday, and only returned home, to begin life in their modest little house in a Wareborough terrace, in time to learn that all was settled, down to the day itself and the number of the bridesmaids.

"As good as married already, you see, Sydney," said Frank. "Well, I only hope it will not prove a case of 'repenting at leisure'—that's all I've got to say."

"Frank," exclaimed the young wife, in surprise and alarm, "what do you mean?"

You have *always* spoken as if you liked Captain Chancellor and thought highly of him. That has been one of my great comforts."

"So it has wanted comfort, has it, the poor little thing?" said Frank, affecting to pat Sydney consolingly. "Why didn't it say so before?"

"Don't, please, dear Frank," she said, earnestly, gently disengaging herself and smoothing the hair his hand had disarranged; "don't laugh at me when I am so serious in my anxiety about Eugenia."

"I am anxious about her too," returned her husband, "but don't mistake me. I am far from meaning to infer that I don't think well of Chancellor. He's by no means a bad fellow, but neither is he a piece of manly perfection, as I fancy Eugenia imagines. She really is so silly, Sydney, so extreme and exaggerated, I am afraid she is sure to have a grand smash some day. She rushes into things so frantically, and it would be perfect waste of breath to try to make her hear reason. And think how

little she and Chancellor really know of each other."

"You don't need to remind me of that," said Sydney, sadly. "Still I hardly see that a longer engagement would have mended matters. They could not have seen much of each other now he is at Bridgenorth, and after all——"

"After all, all marriages are a good deal of a toss-up," said Frank, lightly, "ours of course excepted. But don't fret yourself about Eugenia. She and everyone else must learn their own lessons, I suppose, and I don't see that there is anything to be done to help her."

Sydney sighed and said no more. There was a mixture of truth in what Frank said, but yet on this one subject the sympathy between herself and Gerald was greater than she found in her husband, only, unfortunately, her knowledge of her brother-in-law's secret forbade her appealing to him for comfort or advice. So she was fain to keep her fears to herself and try to see her sister's future as hopefully as she could.

And time went on ; the days and weeks flew rapidly by and the marriage-day drew near. On the Sunday preceding it Captain Chancellor came over from Bridgenorth for a few hours. It seemed to Eugenia that he looked out of spirits.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked anxiously, when they were alone together.

He looked a little surprised at her inquiry.

"What makes you think there is?" he answered, it seemed to her evasively. "No, there is nothing the matter—except, oh yes, by-the-bye, I must not forget to tell you—you will be sorry to hear my sister cannot be with us on Thursday after all."

"Your sister, Mrs. Eyrecourt" exclaimed Eugenia. "Oh, I am so sorry!"

She hardly liked to ask the reason of this sudden change of intention ; Beauchamp was far from communicative about his family affairs, and Eugenia knew little of Mrs. Eyrecourt beyond her name.

"Yes," he replied, "it is a pity. I only heard from her this morning. And oh, by-

the-bye, she enclosed a note for you, not knowing your address."

He felt for his pocket-book, which contained the note. It was a mere civil expression of apology for being obliged at the last to give up thoughts of being present at the ceremony ; it began " Dear Miss Laurence," and ended " Yours sincerely." The reason given for her unavoidable absence was " the serious illness of a near relative." Eugenia looked puzzled.

" A near relative " she said, inquiringly. " Some one on Mr. Eyrecourt's side of the house, I suppose."

" Mr. Eyrecourt is dead," said Beauchamp.

" Oh yes, I know, but I mean it must be a relation of his who is seriously ill. If it were a relation of *yours*, it might be rather awkward, might it not? What should we do?"

" Put off the marriage?" suggested Captain Chancellor, laughing, but not heartily. " Would you like that, Eugenia? Well, as it happens, the person in question *is* a near relation of mine too—the nearest male

relation of my own family in the world. You remember my telling you of the sudden death of a cousin of mine about two months ago—Mr. Chancellor, of Halswood? This boy who is so ill now is his only son.”

“Is he *very* ill?” asked Eugenia.

“Yes,” answered her fiancé, with a slight shortness in his manner, giving the girl the impression that he disliked being questioned on the subject. (“How fond he must be of his poor young cousin!” was her simple interpretation of his unresponsiveness.) “Yes, I fancy so. I don’t suppose he can live long.”

“Then,” persisted Eugenia, her colour rising to her cheeks in spite of her endeavour to be perfectly calm and “sensible,” “then should you not be with him, Beauchamp? Would it not be better—more—more seemly, perhaps, really to put off our marriage?”

She made the suggestion in all good faith and unselfish anxiety in no way to add to what she now imagined must be the cause of her lover’s constraint and depression ;

she was little prepared for the effect of her words.

Captain Chancellor had been standing at a little distance from her, idly fingering a book that lay on the table while she read Mrs. Eyrecourt's note. As she spoke he turned round, crossed the room quickly to where she sat, and stood before her with a dark look on his fair face, an angry light in his blue eyes.

"Are you in earnest, Eugenia? Do you mean what you say?" he exclaimed, in a hard, unpleasant tone. "Do you know that what you have said is a most extraordinary thing for a girl to say to—to the man she is going to marry, two days before the time fixed for doing so? Do you really mean that you are ready to catch at any excuse for putting off our marriage indefinitely? Perhaps you *really* mean that you would like to put it off altogether—if so, you had better say so."

A more suspicious or sophisticated girl would have taken fright at this strange distortion of the simple meaning of her words,

might have guessed it to be a ruse on the part of her fiancé to throw upon her the blame of what he himself was not brave enough to do in a straightforward fashion ; a girl of a haughtier spirit than Eugenia would have felt nothing but indignation at the unmerited reproach, and in nine cases out of ten the "lovers' quarrel" certain to ensue would have ended in something the reverse of "very pretty." But Eugenia was too single-minded in her faith and devotion to feel anything but astonishment and distress.

"Beauchamp," she exclaimed, in a voice brimming over with tender reproach, her brown eyes filling with tears, "oh, Beauchamp, how can you speak so to me? You know, you *must* know, I only meant exactly what I said. I was afraid of being, as it were, in your way just at this crisis, when you may feel you should be with your cousin. I didn't know there was anything 'extraordinary' in what I said. I wanted to be unselfish."

"But it isn't unselfish to propose such a

thing to me in that cool way, as if it would cost you nothing at all," said Captain Chancellor, with a sudden change of tone. "Oh, my darling, you do look so frightfully pretty with the tears in your eyes! Oh, you cold-blooded, aggravating little creature! Do you think that all the cousins in the world may not fall ill and die for what I care when I have you beside me? Don't you think it possible *I* may want to be married whether you do or not?"

He had thrown his arms round her by now, was looking down into her face with all the old "irresistibleness" of eyes and lips, every trace of annoyance melted like snow before the sun.

"Yes," she whispered, her mouth still quivering, "I suppose you do, or," with an attempt at playfulness, "you wouldn't have asked me. And I don't *want* to put it off, Beauchamp, for it isn't as if you were living here and I could often see you. Then I shouldn't mind. But every time you go away I can't help fancying something may go wrong and you may never

come back. And it would be dreadful for you to go away—ever so far off, isn't it?—just now. I should feel dreadfully superstitious about it"—she gave a little shiver—"oh, it would be miserable!"

"Yes, and all the trousseau, and the remarks of Mrs. Grundy and Mr. Jones Robinson!" said Captain Chancellor.

"*Those* things would not trouble me much," said Eugenia, quickly. "I wish you would not think all women are like that, Beauchamp."

But he was in a good humour again by now, so he stroked her pretty hair fondly and told her, whatever being "like that" might mean, he certainly did not think any other woman was like her. And she smiled and was quite happy again, and asked him to promise never to look at her so coldly or speak so harshly, which he did.

"But something must have put you out a little, Beauchamp," she went on, waxing bolder. "I thought so when you first came in. Are you much troubled about your cousin?"

"I am sorry, very sorry, both for him and for his family," replied Captain Chancellor. "But do believe me, Eugenia, there is nothing wrong."

And with this she had to be content. Not that she distrusted him; his tone sounded perfectly sincere, and she did not in the least suspect him of wishing to deceive her. She only fancied that he did not like to cloud the present to her by fully sharing with her his sorrow and anxiety, and this seemed to her a mistake.

A little silence ensued, for Eugenia would not press her inquiries further. Suddenly Beauchamp spoke again.

"I am really losing my head to-day," he said. "I had another letter to tell you of, that I received at the same time as my sister's." He felt in his pocket again. "Ah yes, here it is."

He glanced at it for a moment, then put it into her hands. It was from Roma, written in a very different tone from Mrs. Eyrecourt's stiff little note, and, though

nominally addressed to Beauchamp, evidently intended for them both.

“An idea has struck me,” wrote Roma, “that though Gertrude cannot now be at Wareborough for your marriage, I might manage to be there instead of her, if you and Eugenia (I may call her so, may I not?) would like it. I do not like the idea of no one of your own side of the house being present. We leave town on Tuesday—Gertrude, as she will have told you, and the children, to join the Chancellors at Torquay, and I to go north again for a month. This is sooner than we had intended, so I have not made any plans for my journey, but I am sure Mary Dalrymple will take me in, if you will ask her about it. Please answer by return, and then I can write to her myself. I do hope my proposal will not be unwelcome.”

“How very nice of her!” exclaimed Eugenia, with sparkling eyes. “I am delighted she is coming. Of course we should have asked her at first if we had known she would care to come.

I am so pleased, are not you, Beauchamp?"

"Oh, yes, I don't mind. I have no objection to her coming," said Captain Chancellor, indifferently and somewhat absently. He had taken another letter from his pocket and had been glancing over it while Eugenia read Roma's note. Now he folded it up and put it away, but the perusal of it seemed to have brought a little cloud again to his face.

"Beauchamp, you are very ungrateful. You don't deserve your cousin—Miss Eyrecourt I mean—to be so good to you," said Eugenia, reproachfully.

"Don't I? I fancy I fully deserve all the goodness I get from *her*," replied Beauchamp, with a tinge of bitterness in his tone which made Eugenia tell him he had certainly been rubbed the wrong way by some one or something, he was so moody and captious, which little scolding he took in good part and exerted himself to a greater appearance of amiability, till the few hours of his visit were over and he was due again at Bridgenorth.

It was Mrs. Eyrecourt's letter that had irritated and excited him. In it she told him of Roger's unmistakably hopeless state, mingling regrets that he could not be with the poor boy, "who is so fond of you, you know," with hints of her sisterly interest in the vast change impending in his own prospects. "I cannot pretend not to think of what is coming as it affects you, dearest Beauchamp. I fear I have always been inclined to be ambitious for you, and now when my pride in you seems likely to have the gratification of seeing you in such a position as the head of your house has always had the *power*, if he had the will, to fill, I fear I shall not be easily content. I shall expect great things of you. But I am forgetting—I must not run on as if I still held the first place with you. Other ties and influences must now naturally come before mine. And oh, how earnestly I trust I may agree with you that you have done wisely just now! I own that I felt hurt at your having so completely refrained from consulting or confiding in me, but I have

tried to put aside all such personal feeling and to believe you may have had reason for acting so strangely to me. So do not imagine that I am the least prejudiced, and remember always that your interests can be dearer to no one than to your sister."

It was all very reasonable and natural and sisterly, and no doubt Beauchamp should have felt properly grateful and gratified. But all the same the immediate effect of the letter was to make him very cross; and but for Eugenia's simplicity and unsuspecting sweetness, this last visit to Wareborough might have been a last indeed. And had such a catastrophe occurred, it is hardly to be supposed that Mrs. Eyrecourt would have taken it much to heart.

Nothing of the kind came to pass, however. Thursday arrived, a bright, sunny day; the guests respectively made their appearance, and Eugenia Laurence was married to Beauchamp Chancellor without more ado, finding it, when it came to the point, a harder matter to say farewell to father and sister and to "home," even though only a

dingy old house in a dull Wareborough street, than she had at all been able to anticipate. And it was in tears after all that the bride, whose fondest hopes were realized, who believed herself to be most happy among women, left her father's house, henceforward to be to him very desolate.

"Why can't people get over all their crying beforehand and in private, I wonder," said Mr. Thurston, rather gruffly, as he stood among the other guests to watch the departure of the hero and heroine of the day. He spoke half to himself, but the young lady standing beside him made answer to his remark.

"It is no real test of feeling to cry when one is excited. I fancy it is a mere physical result of the sort of fuss a girl is kept in for some time before. Where a bride is *really* unhappy she would probably exert herself to hide her feelings."

"Then you think Eugenia Laurence—I beg her pardon, Mrs. Chancellor—is *really* happy? At least that is the inference from what you say," inquired Gerald.

"I did not mean to imply anything," answered Roma, lightly. "I only said her crying or not crying had nothing to say to her real feelings. But if you want to know my real opinion—I am almost a stranger to her, remember—I do think she is very, perfectly happy."

She raised her keen but kindly dark eyes to Mr. Thurston as she spoke, and looked him full in the face. "Far better for him to have done at once and for ever with all sentimentalism about her," was the thought in her mind. "She is thoroughly and pathetically in love with Beauchamp and has never cared a straw for Mr. Thurston, and the more completely he realizes this the better for every one concerned." Nevertheless she rather expected to detect some sign of remaining soreness—he had been so very deeply in earnest about the girl, the Eugenia of his dreams, when she had last seen him that night at Brighton at the Montmorris's—to find him shrink from her unpalatable expression of belief in the perfect happiness of Beauchamp's wife. She was disappointed.

Mr. Thurston only looked grave, and his voice was completely free from effort or constraint when he spoke again.

"I am very glad, very thankful that you think so," he said. "I am very much in earnest in my hopes that she will be happy, that she has chosen well for herself. And of course, though you know her slightly, you must know him—Captain Chancellor—well, therefore your opinion has great weight with me."

His eyes, the deep-set, penetrating grey eyes, whose expression, now she saw them again, seemed curiously familiar to her—were fixed on her this time. Roma felt uncomfortable; it was not easy to allow one's words to be taken for more than their value under the scrutiny of Gerald Thurston's gaze. A slight look of embarrassment crept over her face

"Yes," she began, "Beauchamp and I are very old friends; very good friends too. I have a great regard for him. I think he has a great many good qualities but—I did not exactly mean—I don't quite—" she floundered more and more desperately as she

became conscious of the increasing gravity of her hearer's expression, then suddenly she came to a dead stop.

Mr. Thurston did not appear to pity her confusion. He remained silent for a minute, as if half expecting her to speak again, then he said, quietly—

“I wish you would not be afraid of telling me what you really do mean. We seem fated to be confidential with each other at rather short notice, don't we? And I don't think you will consider my interest in what we were speaking of unnatural.”

“No, indeed I do not,” returned Roma, cordially. “And I should be very sorry for you to misunderstand me or attach more weight to what I may say or not say than it is worth. Only when I said I thought Eugenia perfectly happy, I suppose I meant that she thinks herself so.”

“But thinking herself so is being so, is it not?” said Gerald, smiling slightly.

“Yes,” said Roma, doubtfully, “I suppose it is. But, to speak quite plainly,” she went on, growing tired of beating about

the bush and not altogether relishing Mr. Thurston's pertinacity, "what I really mean is that *I* should not consider the fate of being Beauchamp's wife the happiest in the world. But Eugenia thinks so, and long may she continue to do so."

She spoke with a little impatience. Gerald felt puzzled.

"But you like him, don't you?" he said. "He has been almost a sort of brother to you, has he not?"

"Yes, I like him and I think well of him. I wouldn't for worlds have you imagine I do not. But I think Eugenia in many ways too good for him, and if she ever wakes to this the chances are she will not do him justice *then* any more than she does now." She spoke sadly and seriously. Mr. Thurston understood her now, and saw that no shadow of personal feeling had influenced her former speech. His face, too, was grave as he answered her.

"But is she certain to awake?" he said.

"Of that you can judge better than I," answered Roma.

“And, after all, sooner or later everyone must awake,” he went on, as if speaking to himself.

“Except those who have never been asleep,” said Roma. “The longer I live the more thankful I am that I was born an eminently practical person, in no way inclined to exaggerated belief in any one. There is not a grain of tragedy in my composition.”

“I remember your saying something of that kind to me the first time we met,” said Gerald. “I was rather sceptical then, and I don’t know that I am in a more believing frame of mind now. I don’t think you quite know the meaning of your words.”

“Oh yes, I do,” said Roma, laughing. “However, the subject is not worth discussing.”

Gerald saw she did not care for more talk about herself, and when he spoke again it was in a different tone.

“Are they—Captain Chancellor and his wife—likely to be much in your neighbourhood?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I hardly think so. Their plans are rather uncertain, I fancy,” replied Roma, remembering the frail, fast-waning life which alone stood between Beauchamp and a very different future to that anticipated by Eugenia and her friends.” Of course as long as he stays in the army they must go wherever he is sent. Still, no doubt I shall see them sometimes, and,” she hesitated a little, “if my friendship is worth having, you may be sure Eugenia shall have it, such as it is. I think I have fallen a good deal in love with her myself,” she smiled, and then blushed a little, as she remembered to whom she was speaking.

“Thank you,” said Gerald, as fervently as if he had been seeking the goodwill of a new relation for a young, inexperienced sister.

Roma stayed two days at Wareborough before continuing her journey north. She saw Mr. Thurston again once or twice, but their talk was confined to general subjects, and Eugenia was not mentioned, save casually, by either of them.



CHAPTER IX.

A SHORT HONEYMOON.

And the sunshine you recall—
Ah, my dear, but is it true?
Did such sunshine ever fall
Out of any sky so blue?
Half I think you dreamed it all.

—M. BROTHERTON.

THEY were in Paris. It was oppressively hot, glaringly sunny. Under any other circumstances Captain Chancellor would have grumbled outrageously at the heat and the dust and the glare, but in a bridegroom of barely a fortnight, greater philosophy and good temper were to be expected. So he contented himself with groaning within reasonable bounds, and laughing a little at Eugenia's extraordinary energy and powers of enjoyment, for to her, the untraveller, impressionable English girl, it was all

beyond expression charming and intensely interesting. She felt herself in veritable fairyland, she had never before imagined that life could be so enchanting. There was novelty and fascination for her at every step, even the sound of a foreign tongue heard for the first time with the dainty crispness of Parisian accent was delightful to her ears; the shops were not shops, but bewildering masses of lovely things arranged to perfection; the churches, above all, were so beautiful, the music so sublime, that Eugenia wondered how any one living within their reach could ever feel anything but "good."

That her husband thoroughly sympathized in her enjoyment she of course took for granted, and for some time nothing occurred to shake her in this happy belief. It was true to a great extent that he did so, though true in a sense that would have been perfectly incomprehensible to her had any one attempted to explain it. But after a little time Beauchamp began to get rather tired of Eugenia's untireableness. It is

entertaining enough to act spectator to a country cousin's ecstasies, especially if the country cousin in question be a refined, intelligent, and very beautiful girl; but of this amusement, as of most others, Captain Chancellor began to find it was possible to have enough. Then he had a morbid horror of any approach to "gushingness," and there were times at which it appeared to him that, but for her grace and beauty, Eugenia might have fallen under the ban of this terrible charge. And most of all, perhaps, his young wife annoyed him more than once by asking him questions he was obliged to confess he could not answer—questions about some "stupid old picture or other," which in reality his taste was far too uncultivated to admire, though he would have shrunk from confessing to such a barbarism; or she would let her thoughts drift back to the old days—days about which, English girl though she was, she had read much and imagined more—and her eyes would sparkle and colour glow, and sometimes even a tear or two would make its

unbidden appearance as she recalled in fancy the glittering old-world pageants, the tremendous tragedies, the extraordinary fluctuations of national weal and woe of which this Paris—wonderful, beautiful Paris—had been the scene. And at such moments she would look to her companion for sympathy in her enthusiasm, would refer to him, perhaps, for more accurate information about the subject or event momentarily uppermost in her mind; and once, when with a little disappointment—arising not from the failure of the information, but from the evident want of sympathy, she turned away somewhat sadly, the few words which escaped her, “I wish papa were here!” irritated Beauchamp more than he afterwards liked to remember, for his answer had been chilling in the extreme.

“I am really not a walking biography or history, Eugenia,” he had said. “And, besides, I think it is pedantic and affected of you to chatter so about such things. It’s not at all in your line, I assure you.”

Afterwards he tried to soften what he had said.

"I did not mean to speak unkindly to-day when we were at the Luxembourg," he began. "You know that I should never wish to do so, don't you, dearest? I must confess I have two especial *bêtes noires*, and I could not endure to see the least taint of either in my wife."

"What are they?" asked Eugenia, quietly.

"Learned women and gushing young ladies," he answered. "Now don't be hurt, dear. There is nothing of the kind about you really, only you see I want you to be *quite* perfect."

Eugenia did not answer at once. When she spoke her voice did not sound quite like itself.

"I knew you had sometimes thought me too demonstrative," she said; "'gushing' I suppose is the only word for it, but I do *so* dislike it! But as for thinking myself 'learned'—oh, Beauchamp, you cannot mean that! I, that every day of my life am more and more deploring my ignorance!

How could you think me capable of such folly?"

"I did not think you capable of it," answered Beauchamp, slightly nettled. "I only said your manner might make other people think so if you did not take care. And there is another thing I want to say to you, Eugenia. It is really not absolutely necessary for you to tell everybody we meet that you have never been in Paris before. Those people I introduced to you to-day, for instance—Miss Fretville and her brother—I heard you telling them you had not only never been here before, but that you had never been out of England. What business is it of theirs? Why in the world should you expose our private affairs to every casual acquaintance?"

"I had no idea what I said could vex you," said Eugenia, humbly, but with considerable astonishment. "Indeed, I could hardly have avoided it. Miss Fretville asked me if I did not think some street or other wonderfully improved by some new buildings—I forget what—and if I did not

think the Empress had grown much stouter, and ever so many little things like that—you know the sort of things people make talk about at first—and I was obliged to say I had not been here before. Surely it would have been worse to have pretended I knew about things I had never seen? It is no crime never to have been out of England.”

There was a little spice of self-assertion in the last sentences which hardly accorded with Captain Chancellor’s notion of wifely submission.

“Crime!” he repeated. “Nonsense! You know quite well what I mean, only you are so exaggerated. Of course any one that knows you and the quiet way you have been brought up and all that, would not be surprised at your having seen so little; but there is a sort of bravado in decrying one’s antecedents unnecessarily, which appears to me the extreme of bad taste.”

“*Truly*, Beauchamp, I don’t understand you,” said Eugenia earnestly. “I am very sorry for having annoyed you”—here her

voice for the first time faltered a little—"I will try never to do so again in the same way, but—but I do think you fancy things a little. I was not thinking of my 'antece-dents' in any way. I simply answered what I was asked. But I am very sorry—very, very sorry I vexed you." The words came very brokenly now and the brown eyes grew suspiciously dewy.

"Never mind about it any more, then. There is nothing to look miserable about, you silly child," said Beauchamp, beginning to think he had, perhaps, spoken too strongly. "Tears in your eyes! Oh, Eugenia, I believe you know you are irresistible when you cry! But don't, dear, you really mustn't. You would not wish me to be afraid of telling you any little thing that I should like you to alter?"

"No, of course not," answered Eugenia, stifling her wounded feeling and endeavouring to smile in return for his caresses. "Of course not, but only——"

"But only you are a silly child," said her husband, interrupting her. "By-the-

bye, Eugenia, I have been quite surprised to hear how well you speak French ; your accent is excellent. No one would suppose you had never been out of England unless you told it."

"We had a French governess," said Eugenia, "and it is very easy to learn to speak French fairly. Papa cared more about German. Of course German is more of a study than French ; it opens the door to so much ; so many books suffer in the translation."

"Quite a mistake to put German before French," said Captain Chancellor, decidedly. "French will carry you all over the Continent, and any girl who speaks it easily will do very well. There are plenty of English books to read on any subject that comes within a woman's sphere."

Eugenia had it on her lips to give her husband some of her father's opinions on the vexed question he had referred to, but on second thoughts refrained. Beauchamp would be certain to disagree with her, might,

not improbably, ridicule her notions as high-flown and exaggerated, would-be "strong-minded" and altogether absurd, and such ridicule she had not yet learnt to bear with equanimity. So she said no more, and during the remainder of their stay in Paris she conducted herself on all occasions of sightseeing with the nearest approach to amiable impassiveness to which she could attain.

A sudden end came to the honeymoon. One morning there came to Beauchamp a letter in his sister's handwriting. He opened it, glanced at its contents, then, happening to look up and seeing that Eugenia was looking at him with some anxiety—for a certain eagerness in his manner had roused in her a suspicion that the letter was of unusual interest—he said something indistinct about returning immediately and hurriedly left the room. Eugenia felt a little startled, a little curious, and a very little hurt that her husband's first impulse when anything of more than ordinary interest occurred to him should be

to shun rather than seek her sympathy. It never entered her mind to guess the nature of the news contained in Mrs. Eyrecourt's letter. Once or twice when they first left home she had asked Beauchamp if he had heard how "that poor boy his cousin" was, but Captain Chancellor had seemed to shrink from the subject; and out of regard to this feeling of his, she, influenced also by a suspicion that but for her he would have been beside the invalid, had refrained from further allusion to it, and in the excitement of the last few weeks she had almost forgotten ever having heard of Roger at all. So she finished her breakfast without any serious misgiving, enjoying, with a zest so keen as to be a little surprising to herself, a letter from Sydney full of home news, news of their daily doings and commonplace life, the life which but a few months before, Eugenia Laurence had despised as dull and dreary beyond endurance!

Then she sat down to answer Sydney's letter at once, feeling as if she could do so more cheerfully and satisfactorily while the

home feeling was fresh upon her. For sometimes lately—quite lately—it had cost her a little effort to write to Sydney ; why, she had never tried to define.


She had only written half a page when Beauchamp rejoined her. She looked up quickly, then went on with her letter, afraid of appearing to force his confidence. But even the glance, momentary as it had been, had shown her a new expression in her husband's face, a look of repressed excitement such as she had never seen there before. Her instinct had been right ; something had happened. At all times acutely sensitive to any fluctuation in the human atmosphere surrounding her, a sort of thrill now seemed to vibrate through every nerve. Spite of herself the hand shook that held the pen, and a large blot fell on the paper before her. A little exclamation escaped her ; she glanced up quickly and found that Captain Chancellor was looking at her fixedly ; looking at her, but with an absent, pre-occupied expression, as if hardly seeing what was before him. A feeling of increased apprehension

came over her; it was a relief when at last he spoke.

“Eugenia,” he said, solemnly, all unconscious of her state of nervous expectancy, and with something in his tone as if he were preparing to suit himself to the comprehension of a child—an almost imperceptible increase of importance and condescension which puzzled and slightly jarred her—“Eugenia, I want to speak to you, and I must have your full attention. Oblige me by putting away your writing.”

She obeyed him silently. Then, with her beautiful eyes looking up in his face half-timidly—for her expectation was mingled with vague apprehension that in some way or other she might again have unknowingly vexed him—she waited to hear what he had to say.

There was a good deal to explain. She knew so little of his family affairs, was so utterly unprepared for what she had to hear, that once or twice when he first began to speak she interrupted him with some necessary question, obliging him to go over the



ground again more intelligibly. He chafed a little at this, though doing his best to restrain his impatience; so Eugenia, after a minute or two, listened in silence, listened without a movement or an exclamation, or even a glance of surprise or interest, to all he told her of his family's position and possessions, of the former remoteness of his own chance of succession, of the premature death of Herbert Chancellor and now of that of his sickly son, of the consequent complete change in his own circumstances and the different life that now lay before them both. There was a mixture of feelings in Beauchamp as he spoke. He in a sense enjoyed the telling it. He dwelt with a certain gusto upon some of the details, he was conscious of a pleasure, a sort of lordly gratification, in spreading out before the dazzled vision of this innocent little wife of his, the wealth, the position, the many "good things" which were now to be his, and through him hers. He really loved her; he was glad to have so much to bestow, and the thought of her gratitude for his future indulgence, her appreciation of

his past disinterestedness (for "I knew how it would all be some little time ago," he said, "but I judged it better to keep silence for the time") was very sweet to him. But with these not unamiable, if not very lofty, feelings, there mingled others less harmless. Mrs. Eyrecourt's letter had not been without some covert stings, some half-expressed allusions to "what might have been" and what was, and these, though Beauchamp would have repelled them with indignation to her face, were, as usual, not without their uncomfortable effect upon him. And he, to do him justice, was conscious of the unworthiness of harbouring even the shadow of regret for what he had done. He wanted to get rid of it; he had come to Eugenia eager to sun himself in her innocent delight; to realize that, look where he would, he could not have found a sweeter wife, or one so certain to appreciate himself and all he had done and meant to do.

"Only," he had said to himself, "I must make her understand that it would be frightfully bad taste to seem elated. She

herself is so refined I can make her feel this with the merest hint, but those people of hers! There must be no writing off to them about it—I must have no drawing any closer these objectionable Wareborough ties.”

When he had finished all he had to say he waited for a minute, expecting Eugenia to speak. To his surprise she remained perfectly silent. He could not see her face; she had turned it away from him as he was speaking.

“Eugenia,” he said, with some impatience, “what is the matter with you? Have you not understood what I have been telling you?” and as he spoke he laid his hand on her shoulder and made her turn so as to face him. The mystery was explained—Eugenia was in tears.

“Crying!” exclaimed her husband. “What extraordinary creatures women are! Now what in the world can you be crying about.” This unexpected reception of his news was really infinitely more irritating to him than the “elation” he had in imagination deprecated. “Surely,” he went on, as a

thought occurred to him, "surely you are not crying about Roger? You never saw him, you know, and for that matter"—for Beauchamp by no means desired to appear deficient in decorum and good feeling himself—"for that matter I scarcely knew him either. Of course it is very sad; but, after all, sad things are always happening—it's the way of the world. But you must not take other people's troubles to heart so, Eugenia."

"But I am not crying about Roger," said Eugenia, forcing back her tears and wishing she could honestly attribute them to sorrow for the poor boy's death. "Of course I am very sorry for him, at least for his people, but it wasn't that that made me cry."

"Then what was it?" said Beauchamp, coldly.

"It was—I can't exactly explain—" she began, looking as if she was ready to cry again. "I think it was a sort of feeling of disappointment that our life is going to be so different from what I thought it would be. I had planned it all," her voice faltered; "I thought I would show you how well I could

manage, and that we should be so happy without being rich."

Captain Chancellor got up from his chair and walked impatiently to the window.

"Really, Eugenia," he said, contemptuously, "I had no idea you were so utterly childish. I had no idea any woman *could* be so silly."

His tone roused her a little.

"Wiser people than I have thought the same," she answered. "When people really care for each other it draws and keeps them closer together to have to consult each other about everything, always to act together, even perhaps to suffer together. It is in prosperity that they drift apart—when there is no need for either to deny himself or herself for the other."

Captain Chancellor gave a little laugh; he was recovering his good humour, however.

"All very well in theory; all very pretty and romantic," he said; "but I can assure you, my dear child, it is *very* seldom the case in practice. Why, don't you remember

the old proverb about what happens 'when poverty comes in at the door.' There are few truer sayings."

Eugenia did not answer, but her tears were at an end. Beauchamp, satisfied evidently that his superior wisdom had checked her folly, went on to talk of his plans. They must leave Paris at once, to allow him to be in time for poor Roger's funeral, which was to be at Halswood; and, after advising his wife to hasten her packing, he went out to make some inquiries about their journey.

When she was alone again Eugenia returned to her unfinished letter. She read over the last sentence she had written; it was in allusion to something Sydney had mentioned: "I am so pleased to hear that Frank gave you that little table on your birthday. You will think more of it even than if you had got it at first. How pretty your drawing-room must look now the curtains are up!"

The wife of the rich owner of Halswood sighed as she read over the simple words.

Then she hastily added two or three lines to the letter, folded and addressed it, and ringing for the waiter gave it to him to post, as if eager to get it out of her sight. This was what she added to her letter :

“ Beauchamp has just told me of a complete change in our plans. Another death has taken place in his family, that of the young cousin who was so ill, and we must return ” — “ home ” she had written, then had changed it to “ to England ” — “ at once. Our whole future will be altered by this poor boy’s death. Beauchamp says he must sell out and live at Halswood. I forgot to ask him where Halswood is exactly, but I hope it will be easy of access from Wareborough. I had looked forward so to being at Bridgenorth for the next few months and seeing you and papa constantly ! Perhaps you had better say nothing about this change except to papa and Frank, as people talk so about anything of the kind. I will write again as soon as I can.”

Captain Chancellor had forgotten his intended caution against unseemly or

vulgar "elation," but it had not been required.

Two days later Mrs. Eyrecourt was awaiting the arrival of her brother and his wife at Winsley. She had returned there herself the previous day, for as soon as "all was over" as regarded the invalid boy's earthly career, his mother and sisters had left Torquay for the house of some of Mrs. Chancellor's own relations, and Gertrude's presence was no longer required. There was barely time for Beauchamp, as chief mourner, to reach Halswood, but he had managed to arrange to spend one night at Winsley, leaving his wife there till he could rejoin her. She had pleaded for "home" for the week or two of his enforced absence, having discovered, to her delight, that Halswood was but a few hours' journey from Wareborough, but this proposal had not found favour with her lord and master.

"You have never seen my sister yet," he said. "It is quite time you met. I am very anxious for you to make her acquaintance, for you could not possibly have a better or

more judicious friend. Time enough for seeing Sydney again. You have not been away from each other a month yet."

He did not speak unkindly, but something in his tone warned Eugenia to say no more, and to keep to herself her alarm at the thought of a fortnight's tête-à-tête with her pattern sister-in-law, for Roma she found, to her disappointment, had not yet returned from her visit to the northern godmother.

"She is very pretty, extremely pretty, Beauchamp," said Mrs. Eyrecourt, cordially, when alone with her brother for a few minutes the evening of their arrival.

Captain Chancellor smiled and looked pleased.

"And of course," pursued Gertrude, "she has everything at present in her favour. No one will be inclined to be hypercritical on so young a creature. But that sort of thing only lasts its time. *Your* wife, Mrs. Chancellor of Halswood, should show she has something more in her than youth and beauty, if she is to assist you to take the position you should. Tact will do a great

deal in these cases; it is wonderful how much. I wonder if Eugenia has much tact. Is she quick at taking up things? You know how I mean."

Beauchamp's brow slightly clouded over—a remembrance of his little lectures in Paris crossed his mind uncomfortably. He had never been able to persuade himself that Eugenia *had* thoroughly entered into the spirit of his advice.

"She is certainly clever naturally," he replied, evasively, "and I suppose she is what is called well-educated. Her father is a very talented man, in an odd, eccentric way, and education is his hobby. He has taught his daughters all sorts of things—almost as if they were boys."

"Ah, indeed," said Mrs. Eyrecourt, regretfully. "I am sorry to hear that. One must certainly be *somebody* for oddity to pass muster. However, at your wife's age present influence is everything. I remember you said she had very few relations, and those she has she need not see much of. On the whole I confess, Beauchamp, you might

have done worse if you *were* determined to do a thing of the kind."

She smiled as she spoke, and though for a minute Captain Chancellor was half inclined to tell her that her criticism of his wife was impertinent and uncalled for, he thought better of it, partly moved thereto by hearing the rustle of Eugenia's approaching dress ; so he too smiled, and murmured some words expressive of gratification at his sister's favourable opinion.

Just then Eugenia entered the room. She had taken off her travelling dress, and looked fair and sweet and graceful in the white muslin that had replaced it ; and the half shy, half deprecating air which hung about her on this her first introduction to her husband's relations seemed to add to her great beauty. Both brother and sister turned towards her as she came in.

"Gertrude must see how lovely she is," thought Beauchamp. "I wish she could see Eugenia and Addie Chancellor side by side."

And "What a pity she has not a little more

presence and 'style!' " thought Mrs. Eyre-court, who could think vulgar words though incapable of uttering them.

But as neither expressed their thoughts aloud, unbroken peace and harmony were the order of the evening.






CHAPTER X.

ONLY FLOSS !

Minds that have nothing to confer
Find little to perceive.

—WORDSWORTH.

S Eugenia came downstairs the next morning, she met a small person toiling upward, one foot at a time. Eugenia loved children. She stopped at once and knelt down beside the little creature, the better to get sight of the face half hidden by the tangles of wavy hair.

“And who are you, dear?” she said, kindly. “One of my little nieces, I suppose.” She knew that Mrs. Eyrecourt had children, but was ignorant how many or of what ages.

“I don’t know,” said the little girl, rather surlily. “I’m only Floss;” and she

seemed eager to set off again on her journey upstairs.

"Floss? What a nice funny little name!" said her new aunt-in-law, detaining her gently. "Is it because you have got such pretty flossy hair that they call you so?"

"I don't know," said Floss again, but more amiably than before. "I didn't know my hair was pwetty. *Yours* is," touching Eugenia's bright brown tresses as she spoke. "It shines so nice in the sun;" for it was a brilliant summer morning, and some sunbeams had found their way through the quaint pointed windows, lighting up the oak-panelled hall and wide, shallow-stepped staircase where the two were standing. "I like your hair," pursued Floss, waxing confidential. "I don't like light hair, nor I don't like black."

"Don't you, dear? Why not?" asked Eugenia, amused at the oddity of the child.

"Don't tell," said the little girl, cautiously. "I don't like light because mamma's is light, and that other fat girl's;

and I don't like black because Auntie Woma's is black, and nurse's."

Eugenia was a little taken aback. Could the child be "quite right," she wondered.

"Let me see your face, little Floss," she said, pushing back the fair hair from the broad white forehead and raising the child's head a little towards her. "Right!"—of course she was right. There was no want of intellect, or humour either, in the well-shaped little features and green-grey, twinkling eyes.

"You have got a nice face, Floss. Will you give me a kiss?" asked Eugenia. "But, do you know, when I was a little girl I didn't say I didn't like anybody."

"I didn't say that," returned Floss. "I was only speaking of people's hairs. I like you. You're not fat, like that girl! Are you my new aunt? Nurse said my new aunt was coming. Sometimes I like nurse; but, do you know, she does pull my hair so when it is vewy tuggy! Will you tell me about when you was a little girl?"

"Yes, dear," said Eugenia. "You shall

come to my room, or perhaps you and I will go out into the garden together. Now I must run down quick to breakfast."

She left the child with a kiss, but when she got to the dining-room door, happening to glance back again, there was the shaggy head pressed against the bannisters, the funny eyes peering down after her.

"What a queer little girl!" thought Eugenia. "I wonder if her mother was like her at her age? How odd it sounds to hear a child talking about not liking her nearest friends. I wonder if Mrs. Eyre-court and Roma dislike children?"

On the whole Eugenia had felt agreeably disappointed in her sister-in-law. Gertrude looked so young and pretty compared to what she had expected; there was nothing formidable about her.

"I dare say we shall get on very well," thought the bride, quite satisfied with this reasonable anticipation. With all her impulsiveness she had never been given to sudden or vehement friendships, Sydney had been to her all that she wished for in

this direction ; but she was sincerely anxious to please her husband by responding cordially to whatever friendly overtures this sister of his, of whom he evidently thought so highly, might seem disposed to make. So far only one thing had repelled Eugenia ; Mrs. Eyrecourt had seemed almost to forget the night before what a complete stranger Beauchamp's wife still was to all their family interests and connections.

" Or perhaps," thought Eugenia, with a little pang, " she takes it for granted that I know more, that he has told me more than is the case. She may not know," she added to herself, as if to suggest a ground of consolation, " how little opportunity there was for anything of the kind before we were married. And, after all, it was natural they should have a good deal to talk about, only seeing each other for one night and so much having happened since they met, and three are always an awkward party."

Still no doubt she had felt a little lonely ; and, inexperienced as she was, she had missed vaguely what she hardly knew she had ex-

pected—the being “made-of,” perhaps, as she would have been at home had Beauchamp taken her there for her first bridal visit instead of to Winsley—the sort of pleasant little temporary prestige that seems to come naturally to every young wife in the first blush of her new life. None of this had met her at Winsley. Tired as she was, she had dug deep down into one of her trunks to find the pretty simple bride-like dress which Sydney had begged her to keep fresh for the momentous occasion of “being introduced to Captain Chancellor’s friends;” but, so far as her two companions were concerned, it had seemed to Eugenia she might as well have kept on her travelling dress—better perhaps, for it was dark grey and would have seemed more in accordance with Mrs. Eyrecourt’s deep mourning attire, which, it did strike her sister-in-law, she might for the first evening of their arrival have laid aside.

And all through dinner and through the evening that succeeded it, the conversation had not been about things in which the

young wife could have easily taken part ; about their travels, what they had seen &c., nor even about their future in a sense allowing her to make inquiries or remarks. It had been all about Halswood and the Chancellors and other people more or less concerned in the late changes in the family, but of whom Eugenia had never heard. And she had gone to bed at last tired and depressed, with a vague sort of feeling that she was a stranger and outsider, and a foolish, childish, vehement revolt against the life before her.

“ I hate the very name of Halswood ! ” she said to herself, as she sadly unfastened the dress she had put on with some amount of pleasurable anticipation ; “ I have a conviction I shall not be happy there. I wish with all my heart that poor boy were alive again and that nothing of all this had come to Beauchamp.”

Her good sense, however, and previous experience prevented her expressing any of this to her husband ; and her heart smote her a little when he kissed her as fondly as

ever the next morning, and told her she had looked very pretty the night before, "he liked that dress." Only he spoilt it a little by going on to remind her that she must see about mourning at once. Gertrude would advise her what to get and where to order it.

"Indeed she was a little surprised you had not thought of it in Paris. You could easily have left your orders and been fitted," he said; "but, of course, as Gertrude remembered, you would not have known what dressmaker to go to, so perhaps it is as well as it is."

Eugenia resisted the inclination to tell him that she felt quite equal to the management of her clothes without Mrs. Eyre-court's assistance, and the momentary irritation passed away and she laughed at herself for having felt it. It was a bright morning, the view from her window was lovely, she had slept well, and she was only nineteen! It came naturally to her to take a more hopeful view of things than the night before, to make excuses for what had

then appeared to her very wounding neglect, to think it after all possible that life might not be without its roses even at Halswood!

Almost immediately after breakfast Captain Chancellor had to leave.

"It is such a lovely day, Beauchamp," said Mrs. Eyrecourt, "don't you think it would be nice to drive to the station in the pony carriage? I dare say you would like to drive him there, would you not?" she continued, turning to Eugenia. "My ponies are very good."

"Thank you," answered Mrs. Chancellor, "I should *like* it very much, but I cannot drive." She coloured a little, not so much from annoyance at having to confess her deficiencies, as from the consciousness of her sister-in-law's eyes being fixed upon her in a sort of smiling, good-natured criticism. "I don't know anything about horses," she went on, in her nervousness falling into the unnecessary candour against which her husband had warned her. "I have never ridden or driven in my life. My father has no horses. We have never been ac-

customed to anything of the kind at Wareborough."

"Oh indeed," said Mrs. Eyrecourt, urbanely.

But Captain Chancellor got up from his seat with a quick movement, which his wife had already learnt to interpret only too truly. This time, however, she fancied her eyes must have deceived her, for when he spoke his voice sounded as calm and softly modulated as usual.

"Yes," he said, cheerfully, "that's one of the accomplishments you must take up, Eugenia. You must give her some lessons, Gertrude. I don't think you will find her a bad pupil; she has plenty of nerve, and that's the great thing."

Gertrude looked a little surprised, almost, Eugenia fancied, a *very* little disappointed, at her brother's pleasant tone. But she recovered herself instantly.

"I shall be very glad indeed to teach Eugenia anything I know," she said, amiably. "Not that I am half as good a whip as Roma."

Eugenia hardly heard what she said, for the quick thrill of pleasure and gratitude that had shot through her on hearing her husband's words had completely changed the current of her thoughts.

"How good and kind of Beauchamp to speak so of me," she said to herself. "I wish I could remember not to show myself to disadvantage in that stupid way. I wish I were more dignified and reserved."

She only saw him alone for an instant before he left. They were standing in the hall waiting for Mrs. Eyrecourt, who was going to drive her ponies herself, as, probably, she had in her heart intended to do from the first.

"Beauchamp," began Eugenia, eagerly, but in a low voice, looking round to see that no servant was within earshot, "Beauchamp, I did think it so kind of you to speak that way about my learning to drive. I was so afraid what I said might have annoyed you, like that day at the Luxembourg, for you see I haven't got accustomed

to not being over-communicative, but I really will——”

“Don’t speak of it,” he interrupted, angrily, turning from her abruptly. “I expect next to hear you say you never saw silver forks and spoons before. How you can be so unutterably childish and silly, and so regardless of *my* feelings, Eugenia, passes my comprehension. Ah, Gertrude,” with a sudden, but complete, change of tone, as Mrs. Eyrecourt appeared on the staircase, “there you are! I was just thinking of hurrying you; we have no time to spare,” and he hastened forward to hand his sister into the carriage.

Too startled at first to be fully conscious how deeply she was wounded, Eugenia mechanically followed them to the porch, stood there till they had driven off, smiling and nodding farewell.

And this was her first parting from her husband!

When the pony carriage was out of sight Eugenia went up to her own room, and, locking the door against all possibility

of intrusion, wept the bitter tears of youth when it first experiences what it is to be repulsed and scorned by the one it had deemed all sympathy and devotion, when the first terrible suspicion creeps in that it has been deceived in its idol. For none of the small jars in Paris had ended like this; she had felt them acutely at the time, but they had invariably been smoothed over again. But that Beauchamp should have spoken so harshly, so woundingly, just as he was leaving her, when there could be no opportunity of removing the sting his words had left—it was too cruel, and Eugenia's tears flowed afresh.

In one respect she did him injustice. Before she was out of his sight her husband had repented of his harshness; the white, wounded look that had come over her sweet eager face followed him all the day, and had he not been afraid of Gertrude's making fun of him he would have turned back at the lodge and begged Eugenia to forgive him before he left her. Still, at the same time, he remained fully satisfied that he had had

cause for annoyance, and he quite believed that in the end Eugenia, like the rest of her sex, would be none the worse for a few sharp words.

By-and-by it occurred to Eugenia that her sister-in-law's criticism of her red eyes was by no means to be desired. She set to work to bathe them, therefore, and then, the more effectually to remove their traces, she put on her hat and went out for a stroll. How pretty it was out of doors! The house, quaint and irregular, with its gables and latticed windows, was thoroughly to Eugenia's liking; the grounds well kept, but not too modern in appearance to suit the ivy-grown Grange; the beauty of the midsummer sky, the fragrance of the sweet fresh summer-morning air, every object which caught her eye, every breath which wafted across her face seemed full of harmony and content.

"How I wish I could feel happy too!" thought Eugenia.

And, after all, what a very small thing had caused her unhappiness, what a mere

trifle had roused Beauchamp's displeasure ! That was the worst of it, she thought ; if so very little made him angry, how could she hope to avoid incessantly irritating him ? Yet he was not an ill-tempered man exactly—not so much ill-tempered as exacting and prejudiced.

“ We have lived in such different worlds,” said Eugenia to herself, “ that I suppose it is no wonder we do not at once understand each other's feelings on all subjects. Perhaps in a little while I shall manage better, and, of course, before his sister little things may annoy him that would not otherwise do so, and it is nice of him to wish her to see everything about me in the best light. If only he had not gone away angry with me ! ”

Thus she tried to soften and excuse what had so pained her. She would not, even to herself, allow that she felt more than a passing disappointment ; that Beauchamp himself was beginning to reveal a character less admirable, less lofty than her ideal, she was as yet far from owning. The triviality,

and vulgarity even, of some of the prejudices and apprehensions he had avowed, she instinctively refrained from dwelling upon. She could not have understood them had she done so, for the excuses for her husband's smallnesses—the struggling, anomalous circumstances in which the childhood and youth of the brother and sister had been spent, the triumph of Gertrude's successful marriage and her determination that Beauchamp's career should be a brilliant one—all these were unknown to Eugenia. She saw that he was considerably under his sister's influence, much more so, indeed, than she had expected ; but she attributed it to habit and association, knowing little of the greatness of the obligations which he owed to Mrs. Eyre-court.

And even had the whole history been related to her, all the details explained, it would have been of little service. Eugenia was far from the stage of being able to pity or judge leniently where she could not sympathize ; and, indeed, any suggestion

that there were deficiencies in her husband's nature for which she must learn to "make allowance" she would still, at this time, have repelled with indignation; the hard lesson before her could be learnt by herself alone, and the hardest part would be that of recognising the good yet remaining in her lot, though the manner and form of it should be utterly different from the imagined bliss of her girlish dreams.

She was walking slowly up and down the terrace on the south side of the house—the same terrace which had been the scene of Roma's unintentional eavesdropping—when a voice from behind startled her, a small, eager, childish voice.

"Aunty 'Genia," it said, "Aunty 'Genia, I've wunned away from nurse and I want the stowy about when you was a little girl," and from round the corner, running at full speed, appeared Floss, breathless and shaggier even than her wont.

"You've runned away from nurse, Floss?" said Eugenia, seating herself as she spoke on a garden bench beside her, and lifting

the child on to her knee. "I don't know that you should have done that. We had better find nurse first, or she wont know where you are."

"I don't want her to know," replied Floss, opening her eyes and establishing herself more securely in her present quarters; "that's why I wunned away."

She evidently was prepared to resist all recognition of established authority by her new friend; but nurse, less easily deluded than the tiny rebel had imagined, at this juncture fortunately made her appearance, proving by no means loth to accept a half-hour's holiday.

"I will bring Miss Floss in myself," said Eugenia. "You can show me the way to the nursery, can't you, Floss?"

And nurse retreated, murmuring hopes that Mrs. Chancellor would not find her charge too troublesome, and inwardly not a little astonished at the whimsical infant's unwonted sociability.

Floss's next proceeding was to peer up deliberately into her aunt's eyes, pushing

Eugenia's hat back a little off her face, the better to pursue her investigations.

"What are you looking at, Floss?" asked her aunt. "I don't like my hat at the back of my head; the sun makes my eyes ache."

"Your eyes is wed," observed Floss with satisfaction, quite ignoring Eugenia's mild remonstrance. "You've been cwyng. Why do you cwy? Aunt Woma never does."

"Doesn't she?" said Eugenia. "Perhaps she does, only you don't see. Most people cry sometimes, when they are sorry."

"And are you sowwy? I am sowwy if you are," said the child, with a change to tenderness in her tone which Eugenia had not expected. "Have you been naughty and has somebody scolded you? I am *vevy* often scolded," and she shook her head with a curious mixture of resignation and indifference.

"But you are a little girl, poor little Floss, and I am big," said Eugenia, feeling the tears not very far off, however, notwithstanding her self-assertion; "big people

aren't scolded like children. Big people are sorry about other things."

"Then I don't want to be big," said Floss, decidedly. "Now tell me about when you was little. How many dolls had you, and was your cat white or speckly like mine?"

"I had a great many dolls," replied Eugenia, "but they weren't all mine; they were *between* with my sister. But we had no cat."

"What a pity!" said Floss, sympathizingly. "Wouldn't your mamma let you?"

"I had no mamma," said Eugenia; "only a papa and a sister."

"A papa," said Floss, consideringly. "I don't know if papas is nice. *Mammas* isn't, not always. How big was your sister—as big as Quin?"

"How big is Quin?"

"*Vewy* big," said Floss, importantly. "He's past nine. He's away at school now."

"And don't you love him very much?"

"Yes, he's a nice boy, only nurse says

it's a chance if school doesn't spoil him. How could school spoil him? Mamma spoils him, nurse says."

"I think nurse shouldn't say so many things," observed Eugenia, sagely. "But never mind about spoiling. Well, my little sister was very fond of me and I was very fond of her, and we learned our lessons together and had lots of dolls."

"What was their names?" said Floss, nestling up closer on her aunt's knee, in evident anticipation of something very delightful.

"Their names?" said Eugenia. "Why, let me see. There was Lady Evelina, she had blue eyes and light hair, and Lady Francesca, her sister, who had black eyes and hair; and then there were Flora and Lucy and Annette, all smaller dolls. And there was one doll we were very proud of, which a lady brought us from Paris, and we never called her anything but Poupée. And we had one dear old-fashioned wooden doll, with a merry face and red cheeks. We called her Mary Ann Jolly, and I almost

think we loved her the best of all. Dear me," she broke off abruptly, almost forgetting the presence of the child on her knee, "how strange it is to remember all these things! How silly and happy we were! So long ago!"

For "long ago" seem at nineteen the few short years dividing us from what we then call our childhood; though, further on our course, we look back and see that the childishness, the ignorance, the unreal estimates of ourselves and others were still clogging our steps, hindering our true progress—as, indeed, to a greater or less extent is the case to the very end of the toilsome journey. Happy those who keep beside them to that end some others of the companions who started with them at the first, the truthfulness and trust, the earnestness in the present, the yet not inconsistent faith in a far-off better future—a future when much of what perplexes us now shall be made plainer, when we shall be stronger to work, more unselfish to love.

For a moment Eugenia sat silent. But

“Tell me more, aunty, please!” begged Floss, tugging at her dress. And Eugenia set to work and delighted the little creature with a minute biography of each individual doll, ending up with a promise that when Floss came to pay her a visit, “some day,” such of the venerable ladies as were yet in existence should be unearthed from the box in the garret of the Wareborough house, (where not so very long ago Eugenia had one day caught sight of their once familiar faces), and produced for the little girl’s inspection.

By the end of the half-hour agreed upon with nurse there were few traces of tears on Eugenia’s face, and Floss’s kiss and hug of ecstatic gratitude left a brightness behind them which somewhat surprised Mrs. Eyre-court, returning home with slightly contemptuous anticipation of the task before her of “looking after Beauchamp’s wife ; a girl who has seen and knows nothing, and is certain to be crying her eyes out because he has had to leave her.”

Eugenia was on the lawn at the front of the house when Gertrude drove up.

“Such a delightful drive we have had,” exclaimed Mrs. Eyrecourt, throwing the reins to the groom and joining her sister-in-law. “I am so glad I went. It was quite a comfort to see Beauchamp start in good spirits. He has a painful task before him.”

“Yes,” said Eugenia, not indeed knowing what else to say. She was almost entirely in ignorance of the family connections, was unacquainted even with the names of the dead boy’s sisters, and not perfectly sure if his mother was alive or not. But she would not let Gertrude see how little she knew. “I have been amusing myself with your little girl, Mrs. Eyrecourt,” she went on, changing the subject; “we got on so well together. I have just taken her back to nurse.”

“You are very kind,” said Gertrude, “but really you must not trouble yourself so. Floss is a most peculiar child. I think she is happier with her nurse than with anyone else, and I find that being taken notice of spoils her temper, so I do not have her much downstairs. I am so sorry I cannot

stay out longer just now to show you the gardens and what there is to see, but I have several letters to write. And oh, by-the-by, that reminds me, Beauchamp wished me not to let you forget to order your mourning. Under the circumstances, you see, of Beauchamp's being poor Roger's heir, your mourning will have to be deeper than would be ordinarily worn for a second cousin."

"Yes," said Eugenia again. "I was thinking of writing about it to-day."

"Indeed," said Gertrude, a little surprised, "where were you thinking of ordering it? I was going to say I would write to my dressmaker (I think her the very best) and ask her to send down a list of what you should have. Your commoner dresses I suppose you leave to your maid!"

"I have no maid at present," said Eugenia. "The one who was partly maid to Syd—to my sister and me—is remaining with my father as his housekeeper. I am going to have a niece of hers for my maid—a very nice girl, whom I have known all my life. She is at Wareborough now, learning a

little from her aunt, and she will be ready for me when we go there on our way to——”

“Bridgenorth,” she was going to have said, forgetting the complete reversal of all their plans, but remembering it in time to stop short.

“To Halswood?” suggested Gertrude. “Wareborough can hardly be called on the road to Halswood. Halswood, you know, is near Chilworth, quite three hours from Marly Junction. But as to your maid—I hardly think you will find an inexperienced girl sufficient *now*. It is quite different from if you had been going to live quietly at Bridgenorth. Beauchamp will of course send in his papers at once, and he is pretty sure to get leave till he is gazetted out. I daresay I can help you to find a good maid without much difficulty.”

“You are very kind,” said Eugenia, in her turn, “but I should not like to give up Barbara’s niece without a trial. As for my mourning dresses I think it will be best to write to the dressmaker at home who has

always worked for me. I can at least get from her what I want at first."

"A Wareborough dressmaker!" exclaimed Gertrude, lifting her eyebrows. "My dear Eugenia, you must excuse me, but I don't think that sort of thing will please Beauchamp. He is so *very* particular."

"I know he is," replied Eugenia, quietly, "and therefore I always study to please him. He likes all the dresses I have, and no one can be more particular than I am about their fitting well. The person I speak of made this one," touching the pretty lavender dress she was wearing, "and the one I had on last night. Don't you think they fit well?"

"I really have not particularly observed," said Gertrude, less cordially. "I dare say they do, but fitting is not everything."

"Certainly not," said Eugenia, "and of course I know a Wareborough dressmaker cannot make things as fashionably as a London one. But Sydney and I have taken pains to get this person to make our things in the way we like, and I do not care about

being *too* fashionable. I don't think it is good taste."

Mrs. Eyrecourt smiled, but her smile was not a very pleasant one, and she did not repeat her offer. She was far from thinking it worth her while to enter into any discussion with this very daring young person on even so trifling a subject as dress; but in her own mind she resolved to give her brother a hint as to the expediency of at once and for ever separating his wife from the influences of her former home.

"She is pretty enough to do very well if she had more manner and experience," Mrs. Eyrecourt allowed, with the impartiality on which she prided herself. "But she is really incredibly ignorant, and less docile than I expected. Ah, Beauchamp, you have made a sad mistake!"

The half-hour with Floss in the morning proved to have been the pleasantest part of Eugenia's first day at Winsley. Mrs. Eyrecourt was, of course, civil and attentive, but though, had she met her in other circumstances, Eugenia might have bestowed upon

her a fair share of liking, it seemed impossible to Beauchamp's wife to feel perfectly at ease with her; she felt herself, as it were, constantly on the defensive, and felt, too, that Gertrude was as constantly occupied in taking her measure, criticising what she considered her deficiencies, and noting her observations and opinions. It was far from comfortable. Never before, perhaps, in all her life had Eugenia been so painfully self-conscious, never before had her latent antagonism been so fully aroused; and what was, perhaps, in great measure the cause of both, never before had she known the meaning of—"ennui." This sort of life, the being treated with the formality due to a visitor, unsoftened by intimacy or association, was to her intolerably dull. She tried to read, but her attention seemed beyond her control, and there was no one at hand to compare notes with, even if she did succeed in becoming interested; for though Gertrude rather affected literary tastes, and talked a good deal of the advantage and desirability of "keeping up with the books

of the day," her ideas of the books of the day hardly coincided with Eugenia's, and to the girl's inexperience her sister-in-law's narrow-mindedness on many points seemed unparalleled. On some subjects Gertrude could talk with intelligence and even originality, but on few of these subjects was Eugenia much at home. She had never been inside a London theatre, the best singers of the day she knew but by name, she had never seen the Academy! Gossip or even mild scandal was utterly lost upon her, for she was a complete stranger to the section of the fashionable world in which Mrs. Eyrecourt lived and moved and had her being, in which it was her fondest ambition to shine. Gertrude was not much given to exerting herself for the entertainment of her own sex at the best of times, but with respect to her sister-in-law she had really intended to do her utmost, and finding that she did not succeed did not add to her amiability. There would have been some amount of pleasurable excitement in taking Eugenia by the hand in the sense of patron-

izing her, and it had been in this direction that Captain Chancellor had reckoned sanguinely on his sister's goodwill, not taking into account the one obstacle to this comfortable arrangement—Eugenia's decided objection to anything of the kind, which from the first Mrs. Eyrecourt was quick to perceive and indirectly to resent. In this particular, as in many others, Beauchamp had read his wife's character wrong, had been unable to estimate the past influences of her life. He had mistaken docility for weakness; the humility and self-distrust engendered by her great love and faith had seemed to him mere consciousness of ignorance and inexperience—a state of mind, to his thinking, eminently becoming in the untrained girl he had honoured by selecting as his wife.

It happened, unfortunately, too, that just at this time there was considerably less than usual "going on" in the Winsley neighbourhood. Of the adjacent families whom Gertrude thought fit to visit some were still in town, some had illness among them—

nearly all, from one reason or another, were *hors de combat* with respect of dinner-parties, picnics, croquet, and the like. And in a general way the neighbourhood was remarkably sociable and friendly, and would have been very ready to make a nine days' pet of the pretty bride, provided Mrs. Eyrecourt had given it to be understood that such attention to her sister-in-law would be agreeable to herself, for Gertrude managed to "queen it" to a considerable extent over society in her part of the county.

"You will have rather an unfavourable idea of Winsley in one respect, I fear, Eugenia," said Mrs. Eyrecourt, one day. "I mean you must think it very dull. But nearly all our neighbours are still away. A month or two hence it will be quite different."

"I don't care about gaiety much, thank you," replied Eugenia. "I have never been accustomed to it, and I can feel quite as happy without it."

"You are very philosophical," said Gertrude. "But I am surprised to hear you

say you have not been accustomed to that sort of thing. I always understood that up among the Cottonocracy there were all sorts of grand doings; overwhelmingly magnificent dinner-parties and balls, and so on."

"I dare say there are," replied Eugenia, "but we never went to them. My father very seldom let us go anywhere, except to intimate friends like Mrs. Dalrymple."

"Oh indeed!" said Gertrude, and in her own mind she thought, "These Laurences considered themselves too good for Wareborough society, it appears. How absurd people are!"

On the whole, the pleasantest part of Eugenia's days at Winsley was the half-hour in the morning when Floss joined her in her stroll in the garden, or on wet days in her own room. The stories went on at a great rate, and after she had exhausted all those relating to her own childhood Eugenia had to ransack her memory, and sometimes even to set her inventive powers to work. All seemed equally delightful to

Floss. The child had never been so happy in her life, and to Eugenia the consciousness of having gained the little girl's affection was very sweet.

END OF VOL. II.



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